



# CHRISTIAN GOSPEL AND EARTHEN VESSELS

MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONS IN JAPAN:  
THE EARLY YEARS



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**PREFACE**

This project began, for me, in May, 2016 during a conversation with Japan Mennonite Brethren Conference (JMBC) pastors Sugi and Funahashi over lunch in Javier's Mexican restaurant here in Fresno, California. The pastors asked if I would be willing to write a history of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) mission in Japan. Before I can even think about it, I said, I need to know what you have in mind. I asked for answers to several questions.

First, I made it clear that I cannot say anything at all about the history of the JMBC side of MB Church presence in Japan. My Japanese language skills are not good enough and I have no access to written source materials nor are there people here whom I might interview, but I might be able to write something about the mission side since MB mission records are deposited in the Historical Archives in the Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University (FPU). Just the mission side is what we want, was their response.

Then, I asked, "Do you want a celebratory account of all of the good things that have happened, or do you want a more sociological analysis, understanding that sociology can often cast a dim light on things?" We want more of a sociological report, was the answer.

Finally, "Would you like something brief, like an article, or a pamphlet or brochure or do you want a longer report, something like a book?" More like a book, they said. I will see what I can do, I promised.

With that began what proved to be a great adventure for me. First I did some reading in the vast literature on missiology (the study of mission), about which I knew, and still know, very little. And then I needed to learn about the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite and MB foreign missions, of which Japan was only one small part. And, of course, I needed to survey as much as I could of the huge

amount of materials on MB missions in Japan specifically that are stored in the mission archives at FPU.

Early in the process I made a series of decisions. First, I decided to begin with the larger historical context since MB mission work in Japan was just one chapter in the very long and complicated story of the great *missio Dei*, the “Mission of God.” I also needed to review the smaller but still substantial story of Anabaptist-Mennonite missions, of which MB missions are a part. I am convinced that the Japan MB chapter cannot be understood apart from understanding the much larger stories of Christian missions, Anabaptist-Mennonite missions, and MB missions in other places.

Second, I decided not to attempt to write a survey of all of the seventy year history of MB mission work in Japan, but to focus on the early years of the MB mission in Japan. By “early years” I mean the first decades when the Japan Mennonite Brethren Conference was still small and the influences of the early group of missionaries were still strong. That early period had definitely ended by the time the early missionaries retired during the years just prior to 1990, but as early as 1970 the JMBC was already strong enough to make a major decision (not to participate in the Osaka Biblical Seminary) that was made somewhat independently of the missionaries. So as early as 1970 and definitely by 1990, the story of the JMBC becomes the main narrative. Someone else will have to tell that story. My focus is (mostly) on the early years of MB missionary activity.

Third, I decided that rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of all of the people, places, dates, and events of those early years, I would select just a few parts of the story for more detailed summary. I made that decision partly because there are historical timelines and accounts already available in Japanese. My goal was to elaborate on just a few of the major events in the story. This decision means that I might have written too much about some of the topics that I selected and not enough about other parts of the story that might be even more important.

Fourth, I decided that my primary assumed “audience” would be the kinds of persons who invited me to do this project: JMBC pastors. I then prepared a version for pastors and other members of the JMBC who might be interested in the story of the early history of the denomination. I have not written primarily for

persons who know nothing at all about the Anabaptist-Mennonite story, like the Japanese people whom we met who thought that *menonaito* might be a mispronunciation of a Japanese word for the blind: *menonai hito*. Neither did I write with Anabaptist-Mennonite and MB missiological experts in mind, though some of those folks might be interested in some of what I have reported here.

I also decided that insofar as possible I would rely on written materials rather than my own personal recollections or impressions. More specifically, I decided to rely heavily on what my fellow Anabaptist-Mennonite scholars have written. One of my goals was to help the leaders of the JMBC understand more fully what their brothers and sisters in the faith have said about our work together in the great *missio Dei*. So most of the works that I have cited in this report are from Anabaptist-Mennonite sources. Others, of course, would tell the story differently.

Because I had a Japanese audience in mind, I decided early on that I would include a minimal number of footnotes in my manuscript, for several reasons. I did not want to clutter up the manuscript with copious footnotes. Very few of the resources to which I refer are available in Japan and even fewer have been translated into Japanese. Much of what I report in Part One generally reflects a “consensus” concerning Anabaptist and Mennonite history that is available in most of the standard histories of the movement. Documentation is more detailed and more complete in Part Two. In retrospect, I wish I would have been more careful in my citation of sources.

Finally, what follows is a somewhat modified version of the manuscript that I sent to the JMBC for translation into Japanese to be used as part of their celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of MB ministry in Japan. I have edited this version for English-language readers. The biggest change was that Part One was greatly abbreviated in the Japanese version. In this report I have used the original, longer version of Part One. In Part Two I provided a fairly detailed summary of Dr. Robert Lee’s report on MB work in Japan. The JMBC included the entire Lee report as an appendix, so my manuscript included only a brief summary of the Lee report. In order to reduce the length of the document, the JMBC omitted the autobiographical material that is appended to this version. I have deleted a few brief sections, have added a few background comments to other sections, and have changed some of the idiosyncrasies of the Japanese language to forms more

familiar to English language readers. For example, I have changed the honorific suffix *sensei* (e.g. “Arita-*sensei*”) to “Rev.” or “pastor.” The title *sensei* is usually translated as “teacher,” but it is also used to express respect for a broad range of persons, including medical doctors, artists, musicians, and religious leaders such as priests and pastors. I have chosen to use the prefixes “Rev.” and “pastor” interchangeably to translate *sensei*. I have not distinguished between pastors who were licensed from those who were fully ordained, a distinction that was sometimes important in Japan. In a few cases, I have translated *sensei* as “Professor.” I have also placed personal names first, family names second (e.g. Masaru Arita), the reverse of the usual order in Japanese (Arita Masaru). I do not think my editorial changes have substantially altered the narrative that I have provided.

My role in the drama of MB missions in Japan was a marginal one, so I have tried to rely, insofar as possible, on these other Anabaptist-Mennonite and MB voices rather than my own. Of course my perceptions and my prejudices have shaped everything that I have said in this report. No one else would have made exactly the same choices that I made about what to include, and what to leave out. No one else would have reviewed the materials from the same perspective that I have, nor would anyone else have written in the same “voice” that I have used. I have tried to allow the materials to speak for themselves, but, of course, I am entirely responsible for the choices that I have made and the “tone” in which I have written. I must also assume responsibility for any errors of fact that have crept in, and for any misunderstandings and hurt feelings that this report might engender. Hopefully there are enough celebratory comments to balance the concerns and criticisms that I have shared.

We were not a central part of the story of MB mission work in Japan, but the experiences and relationships that Ruth and I (and, for some of those years, our three daughters, too) have enjoyed during the dozen years that we have lived in Japan between the years 1962 and 2006 have been central in shaping who we are as persons, how we view the world, and how we have lived our lives. We can never repay the debt of gratitude that we feel to our many friends in Japan, native and ex-patriot, for their gracious hospitality and for their contributions to the full lives that we have been able to enjoy.



I would like to comment, briefly, on the perspective that I bring and the title that I have given to this report. Behind the title is what has always been one of the most basic convictions of the Christian faith: the idea of “incarnation.” Christians have always believed that in some unique and mysterious way Jesus was BOTH fully human and fully divine. Jesus was BOTH a first-century Jewish man, subject to all of the human foibles and idiosyncrasies that he shared with others who lived in that time and place AND, at the same time, he was also uniquely one with God, the Father. Similarly, Christians have long believed that the Bible is both a collection of human documents, sometimes first passed along by word-of-mouth, and then written, edited and collected in various forms over a period of 1000 years. So the Bible is a very human document, reflecting the literary and other cultural influences of the times and places in which it was composed, but it is also, at the same time, the fully inspired Word of God. The church, too, is the “body” and “bride” of Christ in which Jesus continues to be present, but the church is also a very human social organization, shaped by the many different cultures and societies in which it lives. So the church is always a humanly constructed “earthen vessel,” but the church also at the same time carries, or contains the presence of Christ.

As we shall see, that same dual quality of the human and the divine also characterizes the missionary enterprises of the church. Missionaries have always necessarily carried with them the influences of their own home cultures and societies along with the Christian message that they brought to new and different peoples and communities. And the new convert communities received the Christian message in ways that were different from what the missionaries understood and intended. In the case of the missionaries who “planted” Mennonite Brethren churches in Japan, among many other things, they came to Japan as North Americans who had recently been victorious over Japan in World War II and they arrived in Japan when Japan was still struggling to recover from the devastating defeat, materially and spiritually, that they had recently suffered. As we shall see, almost all of the early MB missionaries in Japan came from rural communities and small towns in Canada and the U.S. Almost all were second or third generation descendants of Mennonites who had migrated from Mennonite communities in South Russia to the middle provinces in Canada and the Midwestern states in the U.S. At the time of their arrival, they were young and

quite inexperienced in the work of the church. As we shall see, these were the “earthen vessels” who carried the Mennonite Brethren version of the Christian gospel to Japan.

In this report I have tried to tell both sides of the story: the many ways in which the early MB missionaries in Japan, like all of us, were shaped and formed by their own culture and society AND, at the same time, they were agents in the great *missio Dei*, the mission of God. I am afraid that sometimes I have emphasized one side at the expense of the other, but it has been my intention to give appropriate attention to both. The MB mission was a very human “earthen vessel,” but it was also the vehicle for the transmission of the Christian gospel from one culture to another.

In the tradition of including words of thanks as part of a Preface, I want to express my gratitude to the many Japanese friends who have enriched our lives, in the Kansai area, in Aichi-ken, and here in Fresno. We have benefitted far more from the hospitality, generosity and friendship of many Japanese people than we will ever be able to repay. I also want to thank my wife, Ruth Neufeld Enns, and our daughters, Terri Enns, Connie Enns-Rempel, and Karen Enns, for making this amazing journey with me. This project is a token of my gratitude to all of you.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The history of Mennonite Brethren (MB) mission work in Japan is part of a larger history of the role of mission and evangelism among the MBs, first in Russia and then in North America. The MB story, in turn, is part of the longer history of Anabaptist-Mennonite movements in Europe in the sixteenth century and, later, in Russia, North America and, finally, around the world. And none of that larger Mennonite story can be understood apart from the great missionary movements of the nineteenth century and the “Christendom” context in Europe and North America that originated with Constantine early in the fourth century.

Serious critical reflection about the mission of the Christian church did not really become widespread until the early decades of the twentieth century. As late as the great World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, there was still a broadly shared consensus about what it meant to spread the Christian Gospel. Part of this consensus was that the missionary task was primarily the responsibility of Christians in Europe and North America. Missionary work was

widely assumed to be part of the larger task of spreading the blessings of “Christian civilization” to other parts of the world. In 1910 it was still easy to think that the missionary task was to bring a better way of life to “primitive heathen who were suffering in spiritual darkness.” By the end of the First World War this optimistic consensus had been shattered by the war, socialist revolutions, scientific discoveries, and decline and conflict in the churches in the West.

One response to the many questions that arose as western churches and societies began to change very rapidly was the development of “Missiology” (the study of mission) as a separate academic discipline, with its own faculty positions and departments in universities and seminaries. The field of missiology soon included sub-specialties such as the history, anthropology, sociology, and theology of mission. By 2020 there is a vast body of research and literature in every area of missiology, and this is as true of the Mennonite world as it is in other parts of the larger Christian community. Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren missiologists have held research and teaching positions in a variety of universities and seminaries, Mennonite and otherwise. They have been experts in the theology, history, anthropology, and sociology of mission. I will mention several of these scholars in what follows.

I will explain, briefly, what I have done in this report. I have selected topics for inclusion that I thought might be of interest to members of the MB church in Japan. I have assumed that the readers will have at least some understanding of the history of the MB movement, and might already have at least some motivation for learning more about the past and how that past continues to shape the present. As one Japanese pastor commented to me, “For us, the mission is like a black box. We do not know what was going on inside.” One of my goals has been to open that “black box,” part of the way, at least.

In order to provide a peek into that “black box,” I have begun, in Part One, with a review of the long history that lies behind MB mission work in Japan. In order to at least partly minimize the intrusion of my own prejudices into this history, I have chosen to include *mostly* matters about which there seems to be a consensus in the scholarly community, and I have chosen to rely *mostly* on MB and other Mennonite sources, since one of my goals is to introduce to Japanese MB church members what MB and other Mennonite scholars are saying about our shared

histories. I want to invite others to join in the conversation about who we are as Mennonite Brethren and how we got to be the way we are.

I have appended my own personal story at the end of this report (Appendix I). Perhaps appending my story at the end will help readers understand how and why I presented these materials as I have, without disrupting the larger story by inserting my own small part along the way.

## PART ONE: MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

The primary purpose of this project is to review the place of Mennonite Brethren mission work in Japan within the context of the larger *missio Dei*, the mission of God. Of course that larger mission has taken many different forms in different times and places, so I will begin with a very brief overview of just a few of the major changes that have happened in the very long history of the *missio Dei*.

### 1. THE LONG STORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

#### THE GLOBAL STORY

The story of the *missio Dei* actually begins with the first *Genesis* accounts, according to which all of creation was initially in a state of *shalom*, peace, harmony, health, and wholeness. God pronounced all of his creation as “good.” But since human (*adam*) sin disrupted Edenic perfection, the goal of God’s mission ever since has been the restoration of the *shalom* that was God’s original intention for his creation.

The call of Abram and the covenant people that descended from him was intended to be one means through which God would bless all of the nations on the earth. The Decalogue received from YHWH by Moses on Mount Sinai was just the beginning of the *Torah* (law) in which YHWH spelled out his expectations for his covenant people. The Jewish prophets reminded their people of the way of life to which they had been called and the prophets looked forward to the fuller realization of God’s intention that all peoples, ages, classes, and genders will one day again live together in *shalom*. Jesus announced that that day had come. He taught and lived in fulfillment of the promised “Kingdom of God,” and he invited others to join him. As had happened to other prophets before him, Jesus’ message was misunderstood and rejected by the religious and political authorities of his day, leading to his execution by crucifixion. But his resurrection from the dead emboldened his followers and led to the establishment of a new kind of *ethnos* (peoplehood), a *koinonia* community of called out people (*ekklesia*) that we call the “Church.”

As had happened to Jesus and the prophets before him, his followers were persecuted and scattered, but as they travelled they carried with them the

message of Jesus and they established new communities of disciples wherever they went, rapidly extending the boundaries of the church to places as far away as India and China. But these new Christian communities remained small and they were suppressed by the political and religious authorities almost everywhere they went. Until early in the fourth century when the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, adopted the Christian religion as his own, and, with that, made Christianity the official religion of his Empire. With this establishment of western “Christendom,” almost everything changed. Church and state became one and they mutually supported one another, a condition that persisted in various forms until the “post-Christian” (and post-many other things) age into which western societies began to transition in earnest during the mid and late twentieth century.

Instead of carrying the Christian *kerygma* (“gospel,” or “good news”) with them as they had done when they were scattered under persecution, the political and religious leaders of the newly established Holy Roman Empire focused their attention on educating and supporting their recently converted pagan populations in what it means to live as Christians. This was not an easy task and it was not very successfully accomplished, so men (and later women, also) who were truly serious about their Christian faith organized themselves into separated monastic communities where they could practice their spiritual disciplines and provide services of various kinds to the ordinary people living around them. One of the functions of these monastic communities was to carry their Christian faith into the Muslim and other non-Roman Catholic communities on the margins of the Holy Roman Empire. One of the means that was used to expand the boundaries of the Christian empire during the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries was the Crusades. The Crusades were a series of military expeditions that were intended to accomplish various political and religious purposes, but they were done in the name of carrying out the purposes (the mission) of God. The crusaders left behind a legacy of resentment that continues to this day. The symbol that the crusaders carried with them was the cross.

During the 350 years from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries, Christian faith was carried to the far corners of the earth along with the colonial expansion of the European powers. The Roman Pope mandated that the kings of Catholic nations such as Spain and Portugal must carry the Christian faith with them as they expanded their domination over newly discovered lands and

peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The European kings used the monks and nuns in the monastic orders in their respective territories to fulfill their missionary responsibilities. That is why the Spanish Franciscans accompanied the *conquistadores* in their conquest of parts of Latin America and the Jesuits traveled with the Portuguese military as they spread their empire down into Africa and across Asia. Soldiers and missionaries disembarked from the same ships. And so it was that in 1549 the Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Fr. Francis Xavier, travelled to Japan from Goa, the Portuguese stronghold in India, to begin his mission work in Japan.

The story of the beginnings of Protestant missionary work is also part of European colonial expansion, but the organizational structures were different from how the Roman Catholics carried out their mission. Most of the early Protestant Reformers believed that Jesus' "Great Commission" to spread the Christian message to the ends of the earth had been fulfilled by the apostles during the first century, so missionary expansion was not really part of their agenda. They faced other challenges in establishing their own "magisterial" religious-political communities in their own territories. The almost universally shared assumption at that time was that there could be only one religion in a territory, and the ruler would decide what that religion would be, an assumption that was called into question during the sixteenth century by the Anabaptists.

The first Protestant ministers to travel to foreign lands were the chaplains who accompanied the merchants and their families who established the British and Dutch "colonies" that produced profits for their home companies. The early Protestant missionaries who were specifically called to carry the gospel to places like Africa, India and China were supported by specially organized mission "societies" that provided finances and other assistance (e.g. the London Missionary Society in 1795, Netherlands Missionary Society in 1797).

Denominational mission organizations came later. For many years one of the goals of most mission organizations was to cooperate with each other insofar as this was possible. "Comity" agreements (dividing mission fields among the various missions so that only one mission organization would operate in their assigned territory) and a series of important missionary conferences (e.g. Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910, Whitby, Ontario, Canada in 1947, and Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974) were also part of these efforts to cooperate in the mission enterprise. The

early Protestant missionaries in Japan were determined that there should be only one ecumenical church body in Japan. They wanted to avoid the denominational divisions and disputes that characterized their churches at home.

Western missionary efforts were inspired by a mixture of motivating factors. Of course one motivation was a spiritual desire to obey Jesus' "Great Commission" to take the Gospel into all the world, but it was also widely assumed that the various forms of Christendom in the nations of the west represented the highest forms of God's desires for humankind and that, therefore, it was "the white man's burden" to carry both the spiritual message of the Gospel AND the social and cultural institutions and practices of the west to the ends of the earth. Language such as "bringing salvation to the poor, benighted heathen living in pagan darkness" was widely used—and sometimes it still is. Also present was a sometimes not-so-subtle undercurrent of racism that at the time was based on "scientific" assumptions about human progress that placed white persons at the pinnacle of the evolutionary process. Given all of this, it was easy to assume that spreading the good news of the gospel and replicating western institutions in foreign lands were two sides of the same coin. Mission efforts to provide a "holistic ministry" to meet the full range of human needs and not just the "spiritual" component often took the form of building mission "stations," or "compounds" with a variety of institutions (especially schools and hospitals) that represented the expansion of "Christendom."

This hopeful understanding of the future of the global mission enterprise undoubtedly reached its apex in 1910 when 1200 delegates gathered in Edinburgh, Scotland, for a World Missionary Conference. The Conference had been preceded by two years of planning and the meetings lasted for nine days. A watchword of the Conference (adopted from the Student Christian Movement) was the very optimistic "Evangelization of the World in This Generation." Confidence that this was a task primarily for western missionaries was evident in the fact that there were only 17 Asian delegates and none from Africa, Latin America, or the Pacific Islands. (It should be noted that one of the Asian delegates was Kajinosuke Ibuka, then President of Meiji Gakuin College in Tokyo.) The Conference was also a very Protestant gathering since there were no representatives from Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic mission organizations. It was still an ecumenical gathering since evangelical mission organizations such



as the China Inland Mission and American and British Baptists participated. The divide between fundamentalists and modernists was not yet as wide in 1910 as it would become just a few years later.

During the years and decades following the World Missionary Conference in 1910, many things happened that undermined these triumphalist assumptions about western domination in missionary work. I will mention several. The split within Protestantism between proponents of a “modernist” “social gospel” that called for social and economic change, and fundamentalist advocacy of the primacy of “soul-winning” and church planting was already underway before 1910 and the divide widened after that. Bloody and disastrous World War I between nations that were presumed to be “Christian” called into question any confidence in human “progress.” Communist revolutions moved entire nations, beginning with Russia, and then China, away from Christianity. Many Mennonites in Russia were victims of Stalin’s attempt to stamp out religion and within just a few years following the communist revolution in China, there were no missionaries left in that country. The world-wide “Great Depression” reduced the supply of funds and personnel that were available for mission work. Scientific investigations contradicted any confidence in the racial superiority of white people. Scholarly findings undermined confidence in simplistic understandings of biblical texts, including the creation accounts in the first chapters of Genesis. Rising tides of nationalism in many countries led to resentment and rejection of the presumed superiority and authority of westerners, including missionaries. Resurgent traditional religions presented new challenges for missionaries. A long-term decline in Christian churches in the west accelerated during the decade of the 1960s and that pattern of decline has continued through the early years of the twenty first century, leading to fewer western missionary personnel, smaller budgets, and disagreements about the purposes of the Christian “mission.” The rise of Pentecostalism and Independent Christian movements in Africa and other places has been disruptive in many traditional denominations, and the related shift of the “center” of Christianity from Europe and America to the global south (“the majority world”) has changed almost everything,

There was once a widely shared understanding that the goal of missionary work was multi-faceted, including proclamation of the gospel, organizing converts into church communities, and “Holistic ministries” such as education, medical care,

and other social ministries (e.g. ending slavery and improving the status of women and children). All of these ministries fit together in relative harmony. Mission “stations” and “compounds” were one institutional expression of this synthesis of “Christianity, civilization, and commerce.” But questions about the purposes of missionary work became acute with the development of fundamentalist and conservative evangelical rejection of “modernism” during the early decades of the twentieth century. Most fundamentalists and many evangelicals felt that the sole purpose (or at least the highest priority) of missionary activity should be the conversion of individuals to Christian faith and the organization of these new believers into self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (“indigenous”) congregations. Responding to the social and material needs of people, they thought, was for “liberals” and “modernists” who believed in a “social gospel.” Efforts to improve health and education or the status of children and women, many evangelicals believed, were legitimate only if they contributed as means to achieve the ultimate goal of “saving souls.”

Rejection of this bifurcation of the spiritual and the social was one of the outcomes of the Lausanne Congress (1974), under the leadership of some Latin American evangelicals. Following Lausanne, there was widespread agreement, even among many evangelicals, that mission work should replicate the ministry of Jesus to whole persons, not just to their “spiritual needs,” nor only to their needs for justice or physical healing. After all, Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming “good news for the poor, release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind: and to let the broken victims go free.” (Luke 4:18) But debates about the purposes of missionary work continued during the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s—and into the present. According to mission historian Scott Sunquist, missiology professor at Fuller Theological Seminary (*Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*, 2013), during the decade of the 1960s, the primary goal of mission work transitioned through three stages, from “proclamation,” to “presence” (or “partnership”), to “dialog.”

Sunquist also suggests that by 2015 there was once again widespread agreement concerning the goals of Christian mission. In fact, he says, there is “greater unity” in the positions of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical thinking about “the global mission task” now than at any time since the Reformation. (p. 164)

There is a widely shared recognition that “social gospel” activism without the gospel message is incomplete, as is preaching and teaching that is not expressed in loving action. “Integration” and “holistic mission” are important current watchwords in many sectors of the Christian world, including, as we will see, among the Mennonite Brethren.

MB mission work in Japan began shortly after the first major global ecumenical mission conference that was convened in 1947, two years after the end of the Second World War. Only 112 delegates from forty nations gathered in Whitby, Ontario, Canada in 1947. The Conference called for all Christians to cooperate in evangelistic and social outreach in the post-war period. The theme of the Conference was “Partnership in Obedience.” The concept of “partnership” became a “driving force” in mission thinking from that time forward. The Whitby Conference also called for “absolute spiritual equality” in Christian witness to the whole world. It is interesting to note that this theme, “Partnership in Obedience,” was changed to “Obedience in Partnership” and used extensively by MB mission leadership during the period when MB mission work was initiated and developed in Japan. I do not know whether MB mission leaders adapted this notion from the Whitby Conference, or from some other source, or reached this position independently, but “partnership” has certainly been one of the main themes in MB mission thinking since shortly after the end of World War II.

## THE JAPANESE STORY

Some of what happened during the long journey of mission history may be illustrated by the story of Christianity in Japan. The story began with the arrival of the Jesuit missionary, Fr. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), from Goa in India in 1549. With this, Xavier and his fellow Jesuit missionaries began a “Catholic Century” of mission in Japan. The missionaries succeeded in converting a number of local feudal rulers (*daimyo*), mostly in the southwestern part of the country. But when the military ruler Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1537-1598) and, later, the *shogun*, Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543-1616), realized that Christianity was becoming a significant presence in parts of Japan (perhaps as much as 10% of the population), they investigated what was happening. They learned soon enough from the Spanish Franciscans, who wanted to begin mission work of their own in Japan, that the Portuguese Jesuits were up to no good. The Shoguns also learned from the Dutch

Protestants, who had their own commercial designs on Japan, that all of the Catholics were nothing more than part of a plot to make Japan part of the Spanish or Portuguese colonial empires. It is easy to understand why the *shogun* Iemitsu Tokugawa, finally issued a series of edicts during the years 1633 to 1639 that closed Japan to almost all foreign contact, outlawed Christianity in Japan, and initiated one of the most brutal systems of persecution ever experienced by Christians anywhere. With this the “Catholic Century” came to an end. What was left was a legacy of suspicion of Christianity as foreign and subversive of the interests of the Japanese people, plus a few small communities of underground *kakure kirishitan* (Hidden Christians) who continued to practice a syncretistic version of their Roman Catholic faith.

When the American Naval Commodore, Matthew Perry, arrived in Japan in 1853 and 1854 with his “black ships” to force the last Tokugawa *shogun* to open Japan to diplomatic and commercial ties with the U.S., missionaries soon followed. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan ended its nearly 250 years of almost total isolation from the rest of the world (*sakoku*). This began a second period of Christian mission in Japan. Like their Catholic missionary forebears, Meiji-era missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant (unlike missions in India which mostly ministered to the impoverished lower caste and “outcaste” communities), used a top-down mission strategy. Missionaries in Japan established schools and hospitals. They worked for improved conditions for girls, women, orphans, and other disadvantaged groups. Many of the former warriors (*samurai*) who found themselves disenfranchised and without a place in society after the government of the Emperor Meiji ended the old feudal system, turned to Christianity because it offered them a new place in a new Christian community and a new meaning for their lives. The new Meiji government was initially open to many things western, including Christianity, which spread rapidly for nearly two decades, but by the early 1890s the Meiji Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) made it clear that Japan would build its new society on its own spiritual and ethical foundations. Western science and technology were necessary for survival in the new industrialized world, but Christianity and the individualism and democratic institutions of the West were not welcome. The legacy of the second period of mission activity in Japan was a sense that Christianity was the source of

many social improvements in society, but it was a foreign religion, mostly for an intellectual elite and the urban upper classes.

A third wave of foreign mission activity in Japan began 90 years after the Meiji Restoration, when General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the occupation forces following the defeat of Japan in 1945, called for thousands of missionaries to be sent to Japan. In his invitation, MacArthur was more concerned about winning the Cold War and stopping the spread of “godless communism” than he was about seeing souls saved and churches planted. But, for whatever variety of reasons, there was a massive influx of missionaries into Japan in the years following the end of World War II. This new contingent of missionaries included many who were reassigned from China to Japan when Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976) closed China to missionary activity in 1950. Many of the new wave of missionaries in Japan in the post-war years represented the evangelical and fundamentalist versions of American and European Christianity. All of the major North American Mennonite groups, including the Mennonite Brethren, were part of this post-WW II influx of foreign missionaries into Japan.

Many things have been said about the implications of the history of missions in general and in Japan specifically, but I will mention only two interrelated points about which there seems to be a general consensus. First, Christian faith was almost always spread along with Western social and cultural institutions. It was not easy for either the missionaries or the “natives” to separate the Gospel from the economic, political, and military power of the more technologically “advanced” sending nations. Assumptions about the superiority of the combination of religion and state called “Christendom” were supported by economic, political, and, sometimes, military power.

Second, it was widely taken-for-granted that Christian communities in Japan and elsewhere would look very much like the Western churches that sent the missionaries “to the ends of the earth.” With few exceptions (Kanzo Uchimura, 1861-1930, founder of the *Mukyukai*, Non-Church Movement, was one.), little thought was given to how understandings of faith (theology) and the church (ecclesiology) might take fundamentally different forms in different cultural contexts. “Contextualization” was not much on the agenda of either the foreign missionaries or the early national church leadership. All of this, and much more,

contributed to the legacy of Christianity in Japan being perceived as a “foreign religion.” Part of the historical memory in Japan is that Christianity “stinks like butter,” which, at that time, was not part of the Japanese diet. That legacy is surely one of the factors that accounts for the small number of Christians in Japan.

This provides part of the historical background and some of the current context for the *missio Dei* in our world today, and, more specifically, for the mission work of the Mennonite Brethren in Japan. The missionary efforts of the various Christian communities have certainly been (partially) broken earthen vessels. But the story of the Anabaptists and Mennonites does not always simply mirror the larger history of Roman Catholic and Protestant missions. The Anabaptists were “Neither Catholic nor Protestant” (the title of a book by Walter Klaassen) and the first Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren missionaries were sent from southern Russia late in the nineteenth century, not from the Catholic colonial powers in Europe, nor from the pillars of Protestant Christendom in Western Europe and North America. I will turn next to the history of Anabaptist and Mennonite mission work, and, in Part Two, to the story of the MB mission in Japan.

## 2. ANABAPTISTS AND MENNONITES: ORIGINS AND EARLY MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

### ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE ORIGINS.

Defining “Anabaptism” might seem to be a simple matter. The word itself means “baptize again,” or “re-baptize.” The derogatory term, Anabaptist, was used to refer to one branch of the Protestant Reformation in Europe during the sixteenth century. The first instance of adult rebaptism happened in Switzerland on January 6, 1525 when a group of men who had been studying with the reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, how to reform the church in Zurich baptized one another in the home of a farmer in the village of Zollikon, not far from Zurich. Intense persecution followed, eventuating in the martyrdom of thousands of men, women and children who had adopted Anabaptist convictions concerning the meaning and practice of Christian faith, including the executions of almost all of the early leaders of the movement.

Re-baptizing as adults people who had first been baptized as infants might not seem to be that significant a matter, but this was just the tip of a very big iceberg, because it called into question many of the assumptions that had held together

the *corpus Christianum* (the Body of Christ) since the time of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. The Roman Catholic Church and all of the Reformers (e.g. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin) were convinced that there could be only one religion in a territory and that the government should determine which religion that would be. Church and state should be one, and they should support each other.

The men who were studying how to reform the church in Zurich reached agreement on some of the steps that should be taken, but they disagreed on how those agreements should be implemented. Zwingli insisted that any changes in church practices must be approved by the City Council while the group who initiated the Anabaptist movement disagreed. The church should be free, they argued, to make its own decisions, based on its biblical and theological convictions. The church should not be subject to the control of the government. For example, the Anabaptists were convinced that if the church decided that biblical baptism symbolized an informed, adult commitment to follow Christ as a member of a Christian community, that understanding should not be submitted to the government for approval before church practices were changed. And if biblical baptism symbolized an adult commitment to follow Christ, then that would be the end of infant baptism, even though both the established church and the state insisted that infant baptism represented an initiation into both the church as a member and into the state as a citizen. The end of infant baptism, the leaders of both church and state were convinced, meant the end of Christendom as it had been known in Europe for over 1,000 years.

There were other implications. The traditional authority of the Pope and the church hierarchy to dictate the meaning of Christian faith and practice from the top down was called into question. All of the reformers talked about the “priesthood of all believers,” but the Anabaptists really believed that a community of disciples could decide together what the biblical texts meant for them. They did not need a Pope to dictate what they should believe and how they should live. When the Anabaptists agreed that the notion of original sin is not found in the biblical texts, this was an additional reason for them to reject infant baptism. If infants do not automatically inherit the sin of Adam (the idea of original sin), then there is no need for baptism to remove the guilt of inherited sin. The traditions of the church and the authority of the Pope were not

necessarily the final word. So the Anabaptists were willing to live in non-conformity with what everyone else believed and practiced. “Believers’ Church,” “Free Church,” and “Radical Reformation” were other terms that have been used for the Anabaptist movement.

The specific act of non-conformity that got the Anabaptists into the most trouble (and still does) was their conviction that obeying Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves and to love even our enemies meant that true Christians must refuse to serve as magistrates or in the military. The Anabaptists were convinced that the use of violence is contrary to the way of peace (*shalom*) that was taught and modeled by Jesus. Violence, they believed, is the foundation of the kingdoms of “this world” but peace is the way of the Kingdom of God and it is to this Kingdom that the Christian’s primary citizenship belongs. From the point of view of most governments, whether “Christian” or otherwise, this position undermines the right of the state to enforce its laws and to protect its citizens from the threats of outsiders. So, from the perspective of the authorities, the Anabaptists were heretics in the eyes of the church and traitors against the state. In the sixteenth century, almost all of the European states, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed, were convinced that the appropriate response to the seditious teachings of the Anabaptists was suppression, and that meant banishment, imprisonment, and even execution of the leaders and those who refused to recant.

However, not all of the various branches of the movement that received the label Anabaptist, shared a commitment to peace. In fact, a violent revolution in the city of Muenster in 1534-35 was used for a very long time (even today) to argue that Anabaptist teachings undermine civil authority and lead to the end of any form of legitimate government. Anabaptists, it was thought, were peaceful only because they had no access to power. If the opportunity arose, they would use violence to get their way, just as had happened in Muenster.

Menno Simons (1495-1561) was one of the many Anabaptist leaders who rejected the violence that had characterized the Muenster revolt, and it is from Menno that the name “Mennonite” derives. Menno was a Roman Catholic priest in Friesland in the northern part of the Netherlands who left his priestly position,



married, and spent most of his adult life as a fugitive underground leader of scattered Anabaptist communities.

Love for God, our neighbors and even our enemies were not the only commands of Jesus that the early Anabaptists sought to obey. From the very beginning they encouraged their believers to follow the final instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples: “Go forth, therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20, NEB) They were convinced that this command was meant for every disciple of Jesus and not just for Jesus’ apostles in the first century, or for an elite class of specially called ministers and missionaries, though from the earliest days of the movement the Anabaptists also called some persons to serve as “apostles” with a charge to spread the gospel to new areas and new communities.

During a special gathering of about 60 Swiss and South German Anabaptist leaders in Augsburg, Germany, in August 1527, some theological differences were discussed and agreements were reached about a strategy for missionary work. “Apostles” were assigned to spread the still very young Anabaptist faith to specific new areas. This is undoubtedly the first attempt to strategically organize a Christian missionary witness since the beginnings of western Christendom in the fourth century, and perhaps it was the first such meeting since the beginnings of the Christian church in the first century. 1527 also marks the beginning of more intense persecution on the part of the authorities in many parts of Europe. In fact, the Augsburg gathering came to be known as the “Martyrs’ Synod” because all but two of the 60 persons who attended the meetings were executed by the authorities.

Similar to the way in which the Christian faith spread in spite (and because) of persecution during the first century, as the early Anabaptists scattered they spread their faith with them so that there were Anabaptist communities in many parts of Europe within the first generation after the origins of the movement. But as persecution intensified, the Anabaptists lost many of their strong leaders to martyrdom and they migrated here and there in a quest for locations where they could practice their faith and support their families in some degree of peace and quiet. Some retreated into remote locations such as mountain valleys in

Switzerland, South Germany, France, and Moravia. Some moved west to the eastern states in the newly independent United States of America where they were able to maintain their unique mixture of Swiss-German language and culture and Anabaptist convictions for a very long time, including the present.

The ancestors of many of the people who later (in 1860) began the Mennonite Brethren movement first migrated east from their homes in the Netherlands to Prussia (now Poland) where they sojourned for some 250 years. During their time in Prussia many of the Mennonites became successful farmers, merchants, and professional people. But when the Prussian government began to pressure the Dutch and German-speaking Mennonites to assimilate into the mainstream society (including accepting conscription into the military) many of the Mennonites moved again, this time to the southern part of Russia (now Ukraine). They moved to Russia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at the invitation of the Russian Czarina, Katherine the Great (1729-1796), who was German, because she promised them newly opened lands and a series of “privileges.” These special privileges included the freedom to continue to operate their own German-language schools and churches and exemption from military service. In exchange, the Mennonite colonists made the fertile prairie lands productive and they promised the Russian government that they would not proselytize among the Russian citizens around them, since they were almost all baptized as infants into membership the Russian Orthodox Church.

So wherever the Mennonites settled, missionary work came to an almost complete stop, first because of persecution, but also because most Mennonites lived in geographically and culturally isolated rural communities, and because they had agreements with the host governments that they would not proselytize among the local populations. For these and other reasons, the Anabaptists and Mennonites became *die stille im lande*, “the quiet in the land.”

#### EARLY MENNONITE MISSION EFFORTS

The Anabaptist-Mennonites in the Netherlands were the first to experience some degree of freedom to practice their own non-conformist faith when the Dutch government issued an edict in 1579 declaring freedom of conscience, though many restrictions remained. A greater degree of religious toleration was granted by the Dutch government in 1796, after which the Dutch Anabaptists were more

free to build their own places of worship and to create their own organizations (e.g. they established their own seminary in 1735). The “Doopsgezinde” (literally the “Baptism-minded,” the name the Dutch Anabaptists preferred rather than “Menists” or “Mennonite”) grew to be a substantial part of the population in the Netherlands (as much as 10%) and many rose to influential positions in Dutch society. Along with most other Protestant communities in Europe and North America, the Doopsgezinde joined in the missionary efforts of the “Great Century” of Christian missions, the 1800s.

Beginning in the 1820s the Doopsgezinde churches sent money to help support the work of the English Baptist Mission, and during the 1830s they helped support the missionary work of the German Baptists, but because they disagreed with the Baptists’ insistence on immersion as the only acceptable mode of baptism (and because of some other issues), they formed their own Dutch Mennonite Missionary Association in 1847. In 1851 they sent Peter Jansz (1820-1904) as their first missionary to Indonesia.

At about this same time, there was growing interest in missionary activity among the Mennonite colonists in south Russia. Initially they cooperated with the Dutch Mennonites, sending money to help support the work of the mission in Indonesia, but the Russian Mennonites organized their own mission society in 1860 and sent their first missionary, Heinrich Dirks (1842-1915), to Indonesia in 1867.

Many historians and missiologists have pointed out that the missionary movement that began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a product of two other movements of that same era: pietism and the “great awakenings” that were happening in Europe and North America. I will cite only two early points of contact between pietists and Mennonites. A British Baptist pietist minister, William Angas, visited the Mennonites in the Netherlands in 1821 and Prussia in 1824, encouraging them to join in support of his mission, which they did. And a pious German Baptist leader, Johann Oncken (1800-1884), also influenced Mennonites with his visits in Holland, Prussia, and south Russia. Oncken encouraged missionary activity and support in all of these places, including, as we shall see, the Mennonites in the colonies in Russia.

This very brief survey brings us to the story of the origins of the Mennonite Brethren denomination and the mission programs to which they gave birth,

including, 90 years after the founding of the denomination, MB mission activities in Japan.

### 3. THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN

#### MENNONITES IN RUSSIA

It is impossible to understand MB mission personnel and programs in Japan without some understanding of the complicated history of the denomination that they represented. I will begin with a brief introduction to the social context of the Mennonites in Russia. Mennonites had begun to arrive in south Russia from Prussia in the late 1700s and early 1800s. By 1850 there were more than 50,000 Mennonites in Russia, most of whom resided in two large colonies (Chortiza and Molotschna) located approximately 30 miles apart between Kiev and Odessa along the Dnieper River. They brought with them a prior history of migrations, first from the “low countries” in northern Europe to Prussia, and then to Russia. Their migrations were motivated in part by their desire to continue to practice their Anabaptist faith in some degree of freedom and also by their need to find places where they could provide economic support for their families and their communities. They also brought with them a desire to maintain their Dutch-German language and culture. For about 200 years Prussia provided them with the kind of environment they were looking for, but some began to search for a new “homeland” when their religious liberties (including exemption from military service) were threatened by the government. Many left, but some Mennonites remained in Poland through the end of World War II when they finally tried to escape west in front of the advancing Soviet army. No Mennonites remain in Poland today. It is a very tragic story.

By mid-century (1850) some of the Mennonites in the Russian colonies had prospered both economically and socially. Members of the Russian Mennonite upper class owned vast parcels of land (One Mennonite owned 52,000 acres.) and they lived in fine mansions with as many as 74 rooms. They owned factories and mills and breweries. They employed both Russian and German servants in their homes and as workers on their farms. Some of their young people studied in Germany. Since the Mennonites were responsible for their own self-governance in the colonies, the wealthy exercised considerable power both politically and in their churches. In many ways, the Mennonites constructed their own miniature

“Christendom” in their colonies. But, since the amount of land that was made available to the Mennonites by the Russian government was limited, by mid-century as many as two-thirds of the members of the Mennonite communities owned no property. Many of these “landless” Mennonites lived in poverty. Since only landowners could vote, the landless were not only economically disadvantaged but they were politically disenfranchised. The Mennonites in Russia were so determined to maintain both their traditional religious practices *and* their Dutch-German language and culture that when, in the 1860s, the Russian government began to pressure them to assimilate into the mainstream culture by giving up their use of the German language, control of their schools, and accepting conscription into the military, approximately 18,000 (or about one third of the total population at that time, including many members of the newly founded Mennonite Brethren movement) emigrated to North America during the 1870s and 1880s. Many of these emigres were landless Mennonites who saw no future for themselves in Russia.

But social conditions are never static, so things were changing, even in the geographically and culturally isolated Mennonite communities in Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century. To cite but one example: Johann Cornies (1798-1848) was an important Mennonite leader who brought many reforms to the colonies. He introduced new crops and new farming techniques. He standardized the curriculum in the schools and prescribed how school buildings should be constructed. He organized forestation projects. He introduced new construction techniques and new ways of organizing the villages. In general, he moved the Mennonite communities in a “modern” direction.

The last decades of the nineteenth and the first 15 years of the twentieth century represented the “Golden Years” of the Mennonites’ sojourn in Russia. Many lived in substantial and attractive homes (even though there were barns for their animals attached) along tree-lined village streets. They built some beautiful, cathedral-like sanctuaries with stained glass windows, pipe organs, and floor tiles from Italy. They operated fine schools (through high school). Their factories produced farm equipment and other products that were used throughout southern Russia and beyond. Their savings-and-loan company and other institutions were located in fine buildings. They built a whole series of institutions that served the needs of their community and others around them: hospitals, a

nursing school, facilities for orphans, the elderly, the mentally ill, and the blind. Almost all of this was conducted in one of two dialects of the Dutch or German language: “low German” was spoken in homes and on the streets, and the more formal “high German” was used in churches and schools. Many also became fluent in the Russian language. Few Russian Mennonites were interested in emigrating during those years of comfortable prosperity.

But all of that came to a sudden and tragic end. World War I brought the German military into the Mennonite territories where they welcomed the Germans, since they shared a similar language and culture. Battles between the Russian and German military raged across the Mennonite territories. As if that were not enough, bands of anarchists terrorized residents in the villages in the area. Then came the Russian Revolution and units of the White (loyal to the central government) and Red (communist) armies again battled each other across the Mennonite homelands. When Stalin finally prevailed, he jailed and exiled many of the Mennonites. They were suspect because they were Germans and also because many were labeled, arrested, exiled to Siberia, and executed as capitalist *kulaks*. Churches were closed and the leaders were persecuted or “disappeared,” meaning that they were taken away by the authorities and never heard from again. Few were permitted to leave but almost anyone who was able to emigrate did so, some to the U.S. and many to Canada.

During those tumultuous times, there was a development that has been mostly regretted, but is still debated to this day. Some of the Mennonites in the colonies in Russia organized their own *selbstschutz*, a self-defense force to protect their own lives and property. Since there was no functioning government to provide any security at all, some of the Mennonites took matters into their own hands, even though this represented a departure from 400 years of Mennonite commitment to peace and non-resistance. In the chaos of the times, Nestor Machno, the leader of a small army of anarchists, took advantage of the situation. Machno, it is said, had once worked for some Mennonites (He spoke some low-German.) and felt that he had been treated unjustly, so he was out for revenge. He and his men freely occupied Mennonite homes, ate the food, took whatever property they desired, spread diseases, raped women young and old, and murdered at will. A total of some 600 Mennonites were killed by Machno and his men. The suffering was terrible.

The *selbstschutz* were organized, trained, and supplied with weapons and ammunition by German military officers who were in the area. Some 2000 Mennonites participated. They engaged in battles with Machno's army but were finally defeated when Machno joined forces with the Red Army. No one who has not experienced what the Mennonites had to endure in those days should be quick to pass judgement on those who decided to participate in the *selbstschutz*, but the long-term results were devastating. The Soviet government took this as further evidence of the subversive disloyalty of the Mennonite (and other ethnic German) people who lived in Russia and this contributed to the eventual decision after World War II to remove all of the Mennonites who remained in their Mennonite homelands.

During World War II, the German army again advanced as far east as the Mennonite territories, where they were once again welcomed by the Mennonites as rescuers from their suffering under Stalin's policies. But when the Soviet army began to push the Germans back toward the west, many Mennonites packed up what they could and tried to escape, with ox carts and on foot, in front of the retreating Germans and the advancing Russians. When the Russians were able to overtake their fleeing Mennonite citizens, many were killed and others were shipped back east in railroad box cars where they were scattered along the rail lines or imprisoned in the Siberian *gulags*. Almost no Mennonites remained in their former homelands. The suffering was not unlike the genocides experienced by the Jews under Hitler and the Armenians under the Turks.

With *perestroika* under Gorbachev during the 1980s and then the collapse of the Soviet system, the Mennonites who remained scattered across Russia were finally allowed to leave. Many settled in Germany, where they were welcomed and assisted by the government. Others migrated to Canada and several countries in South America. The U.S. was mostly closed to them at that time.

## MENNONITE MIGRATIONS

All of this provides just a small part of the historical memory of many Mennonites from Russia and the social context from which the Mennonite Brethren in North America came. I will mention just two other interrelated points about the social location of the Mennonite Brethren. First, as I have indicated, there have been several waves of Mennonite (including MB) migrations out of Russia. The first was

during the 1870s and 1880s. Most of the 18,000 Mennonites who migrated during those years settled in the Midwestern states in the U.S. and a smaller number settled in Canada, mostly in the Prairie Provinces. The second wave of migration happened during and after WW I and the Russian Revolution. Most of these immigrants settled in Canada. A third wave of migration happened during and after WW II but most of these immigrants settled in South America and Canada since the U.S. was unwilling to accept large numbers of immigrants at that time. A final wave of Mennonite migration from Russia followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Most of those more recent migrants (*umseidler*) settled in Germany. In North America, internal migrations from the Midwestern prairies to the western states in the U.S. and the western provinces in Canada began during the first decade of the twentieth century, and, in the U.S. that movement was accelerated in the 1930s during the disastrous “Dust Bowl” in the mid-western and southwestern areas where Mennonites were trying to farm, and the dislocations caused by the “Great Depression.”

Second, migrations of North American Mennonites from rural to urban areas did not begin in significant numbers until the 1940s, during and just after the Second World War. So in the 1950s when Mennonite mission work began in Japan, almost all members of the denomination still lived on farms or in villages and small towns. On the Canadian side, there were sharp differences between the descendants of the early arrivals from the 1870s and 1880s (*Kanadier*) and the more recent immigrants from Russia (*Russlander*), many of whom were still German-speaking first generation immigrants. On the U.S. side, almost all were third and fourth generation immigrants. The German language was no longer widely used in MB churches in the U.S. after the start of World War II but in Canada, many MB churches continued to use the German language for another generation, until the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s.

All of this should make it clear that at mid-century (1950) the social and cultural experiences of the MBs in North America were already quite diverse. Canada and the U.S. have different histories and different social, political and cultural systems. The social experiences of Mennonites who live on farms, in small towns, or in cities differ significantly. People who work on farms, or as blue or white collar employees, or who are owners of small or large businesses, or who engage in professional occupations are likely to have quite different life experiences.



Whether in Canada or the U.S., the social and cultural experiences of the German-speaking immigrant generation are likely to be quite different from the life-styles of their second generation children and their English-speaking third and fourth generation grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All of this has implications for the shape of MB religious beliefs and actions, including MB mission programs.

#### 4. MENNONITE BRETHREN IN NORTH AMERICA

##### FINDING NEW HOMES IN NORTH AMERICA

The first Mennonites arrived in North America in 1683, nearly 200 years before the arrival of the first Mennonites from Russia in 1874. Those earliest Mennonite settlers in the U.S. were Dutch and North German Mennonites who migrated from Krefeld in north Germany. They settled in Germantown, near Philadelphia (the “city of brotherly love”) in the state of Pennsylvania that had been established by Quaker William Penn. The first Mennonite congregation in North America was located in Germantown. They began to meet for worship in homes in 1690 and they constructed their own log meetinghouse in 1708. A stone building came later. Other early Mennonite arrivals settled in other parts of Pennsylvania and in the nearby eastern state of Virginia. Most of the first Mennonite settlers migrated from Switzerland and south Germany. By the time Mennonites from Russia began to arrive in North America in the 1870s, the earlier settlers had expanded westward into other states, including Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois. Some of the Mennonites who had arrived earlier were enormously helpful to their Russian brothers and sisters in the faith who arrived in large numbers (about 18,000) during the decades of the 1870s and 1880s.

Because of their agrarian background in Russia, almost all of the new Mennonite immigrants to North America looked for farm land that was both inexpensive and promised to be productive. Because most of the good farm land in the eastern states was already occupied, and was, therefore, not available or was too expensive to purchase, almost all of the MB immigrants from Russia traveled west of where the Swiss and South German Mennonites had settled, into the prairie states of Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Even today there are no MB congregations in the U.S. east of the Mississippi River (except for a small “conference” of African American congregations in North Carolina that were planted by Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) missionaries). In the decades that

followed, internal migrations continued south into Oklahoma and then Texas, and west to Colorado and Idaho, and, finally, to the western states, including California where many settled in the fertile San Joaquin Valley in central California during the early decades of the twentieth century.

In most of the areas where they settled after their arrival from Russia, the new Mennonite immigrants were “pioneer” farmers. They moved onto virgin lands from which Native Americans had recently been removed. So the Mennonite farmers first removed the trees and other native vegetation, used horses and oxen to “break the sod,” and planted their crops, which were mostly wheat and corn. The “Turkey red wheat” that they brought with them from Russia proved to be very productive on the North American prairies. Many of the early settlers lived for a time in simple sod houses that were partially excavated below ground level. They initially settled in villages as they had known them in Russia, with their residences located in proximity along a single village street, but they soon adopted the American pattern of farmhouses scattered across the countryside, with each family residing on their own plot of farm land, usually within commuting distance (by horse-drawn wagon or sled) to a nearby village or small town. Almost all MB immigrants from Russia were farmers. Migrations from rural to urban areas and from agriculture to other means of livelihood did not happen in large numbers until after World War II.

It is not difficult to imagine just how exciting missionary reports were for these rural and small town MBs who were living in geographic and cultural isolation in those days before television and daily newspapers and access to libraries. Fast, inexpensive, and convenient travel was not yet possible, so most people stayed mostly at home. People gathered for mission “festivals” and special church presentations by visiting foreign missionaries who dressed in strange native costumes, spoke and sang in exotic foreign languages, told dramatic tales of bizarre cultural customs, dangerous jungle adventures, and miracles that were almost beyond belief. For a couple of decades, missionaries also fascinated their audiences with slide and movie shows that not only used technology that was new and exciting, but they showed people and scenes that few viewers could even have imagined. In many churches in those times and places, missionaries were respected and admired as spiritual giants. They were Christian folk heroes.

Missionaries opened up the world for people who had little information about what was going on beyond their own limited spheres of experience.

## PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION

### Early Decisions

The MBs in Russia did not organize as a conference until 1874, 12 years after their separation from the established Mennonites, but the MBs in North America moved much more quickly. In 1878 just four years after they first began to arrive, about a dozen men from MB groups in Kansas and Nebraska gathered in the small town of Henderson, Nebraska, to discuss the possibility of organizing as a conference. The first MB Conference in North America met the following year, in 1879, also in Henderson, Nebraska, with representatives from Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas present. On that first Sunday they held a “mission festival,” and then they discussed other church business during the next two days.

A major outcome of the first Conference was a decision to appoint several brethren to serve as itinerant ministers, similar to the pattern that had been established in Russia. The assignment of these traveling ministers was to assist in the organization of the new congregations that were being formed by the settlers; to conduct evangelistic services in the communities where the MB churches were located; and to provide spiritual nurture for the newly founded MB congregations. There seems to be general agreement that these itinerant ministers were very important in developing and maintaining a sense of shared identity and order in the first MB congregations that were scattered across the prairie states and up into the Canadian provinces.

During that first conference in 1879, the gathered brethren also organized a Home Missions Committee to coordinate outreach and mission efforts. Since they were no longer prohibited by governmental agreements from seeking to convert Russian people, an early activity of the MB Home Missions Committee was to organize outreach programs to Russian immigrants who were living in Canada and the U.S. The Committee also supported N. N. Hiebert to serve as a “traveling missionary” to encourage support for mission activities.

The MBs gathered annually for conference meetings from 1879 to 1909. Mission was always on the agenda. The Home Mission Committee channeled the funds

that were gathered to the Baptist mission in India, and, later, China and Africa. In 1894, they realized that there were also “‘heathen’ living in spiritual darkness” closer to home, so they sent missionary Henry Kohfeld to evangelize the Comanche Indian people who were living in Oklahoma, so this was the first North American MB “foreign” mission field.

During their conference in 1898, the MBs adopted the “principle” that they would not send missionaries under the control of an outside agency. They would use their resources of finances and personnel in programs under their own control. MBs who served under other mission organizations should be financed by those organizations. During that same conference the MBs in North America appointed Mr. and Mrs. N. N. Hiebert to serve as their own first missionaries to work among the Telegu people in South India, where MB missionaries from Russia were already serving. Four others were sent in 1901. India became one of the largest MB mission fields. The MB field covered 10,000 square miles and had a population of 1.5 million people. It was eventually served by nine mission stations.

### District Conferences

I will mention just three of many important organizational changes that happened during the 140 year history of the MBs in North America. The first major organizational change happened in 1909. From 1879 to 1909, MBs gathered annually for meetings of their conference. But as the numbers of members increased (mostly because of immigration and high birth rates) and as MB people spread into other parts of the western United States, annual meetings of the conference became more difficult, so the conference was divided into three regional, or district, conferences. In the years following 1909, the General Conference met only once every three years. After 1909 there was also a new division of labor between the bi-national MB General Conference and the regional district conferences. Districts were assigned responsibility for home mission (and other) local programs while the General Conference retained responsibility for foreign mission (and some other) programs.

### Reorganization Rejected

A second major structural change was proposed in 1951 but ultimately rejected, so this change is one that did *not* happen. In the years just before, during and

following World War II, MBs in North America experienced many very substantial social changes. They became more widely dispersed geographically across the Midwestern and Western states and provinces. They began to move in ever larger numbers from living and farming in rural areas to a variety of occupations in urban centers. Levels of education increased and many MBs became more affluent, moving higher in the class system. Intermarriages between MBs and “outsiders” increased. Beginning in the 1930s, many congregations transitioned from lay to professional pastoral leadership. Since the MBs did not yet have their own seminary, these new full-time pastors brought with them the variety of theologies that they had learned in the seminaries they had attended. There was a rising crescendo of concern that the MBs were abandoning their own spiritual heritage; losing the particular identity and mission to which they had been called by God; and were succumbing to the individualism, materialism, relativism and patriotic nationalism of the society around them.

In response to these and other concerns, the Board of Reference and Counsel (BORAC, later called “Faith and Life”) appointed a committee of seven of the wisest, most experienced, and most highly respected leaders of the conference, with representatives from each of the districts and from both Canada and the U.S. This committee of elder statesmen (They were all male, as was most church leadership until late in the twentieth century.) submitted their report to the North American General Conference of MB Churches in 1951. The report detailed the erosion of consensus and the weakening ability to act collectively that characterized the MBs at mid-century. Historically, the report stated, MB organizational structures had maintained a healthy balance between the autonomy of the local congregation (congregational form of church governance) and the authority of the centralized boards and committees of the Conference (Presbyterian form of church governance), but by mid-century that balance had shifted to such a high level of focus on the local congregations that the ability of the Conference to maintain a shared identity and to take corporate action was seriously threatened.

The solution that the committee recommended was the creation of a new Board of Elders that would have far greater power than the Board of Reference and Council, whose actions were limited to providing advice and aid to local congregations. Decisions made by the Board of Elders, according to the

recommendation, would be “final,” subject to change only by action of the Conference. This radical proposal for restructuring the Conference was submitted to the district conferences and local congregations for their responses. Each of the district conferences rejected the proposal. The attitude of “Let the conference decide what it wishes. We will go back home and do what we think is best.” prevailed, leading many to predict the eventual end of any consensus concerning MB identity, the loss of ability to work together in mission, education, and the other programs of the General Conference, and, eventually the demise of the General Conference.

The radical restructuring of the General Conference that the committee recommended did not happen, but part of the concern that the committee identified was addressed by the creation of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (MBBS) in Fresno, California, in 1955. During its early years, the seminary was owned and operated by the U.S. Conference of MB Churches but in 1975 it was adopted as the seminary of the North American General Conference so it was a joint Canadian-U.S. institution until shortly after the dissolution of the General Conference in 2000. Dissolution of the Canadian-U.S. General Conference meant that the MB seminary in Fresno, California needed a new organizational structure. After exploring a variety of options (including the possibility of a merger with Fuller Theological Seminary), MBBS became the Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary (FPBS), an institution of the Pacific District Conference of MB Churches. The Canadian MBs created their own theological training system and Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, also initiated new programs in pastoral preparation. What the 1951 committee had feared was actually coming to pass.

#### Dissolution of the North American General Conference

A third major organizational change that I have already mentioned happened in 1999 when a decision was made that the North American General Conference would be “dissolved” into two national conferences: Canada and United States. The two national conferences were then free to follow their own separate paths. The two national conferences have chosen to move in somewhat different directions. For example, they have taken differing positions on the role of women in pastoral ministry (Canadian MBs accept women as lead pastors, U.S. MBs do not.) and U.S. MBs changed the statement on participation in the military in their

Confession of Faith. As I have already mentioned, the Canadian MBs withdrew their support from MBBS as a jointly operated seminary, and they created their own system for pastoral preparation, as did the districts that support Tabor College in Kansas. Nevertheless, the two national conferences continue to cooperate in supporting Mennonite Brethren Mission (MBM) programs (now “Multiply”), but the long-standing North American General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches no longer exists.

## 5. THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN

It is widely acknowledged that by the middle of the nineteenth century there were serious problems in the religious lives of the Mennonite colonists in south Russia. Contrary to the early Anabaptist insistence on separation of church and state, the two institutions were essentially one in the colonies, as had been the case in European “Christendom” since Constantine. The Mennonites were responsible for providing for their own governance, including police services in their own communities. Since only members of the Mennonite church were permitted to own land in the colonies, motivations for joining the church were mixed. Baptism into church membership was often little more than a social ritual that followed a routine process of memorizing the answers to a series of questions in a catechism class. Baptism was often received primarily as a prelude to marriage. Ministers were sometimes chosen by lot, with little regard for their spiritual maturity or moral character. Old sermons were read and re-read. There were repeated complaints about drunkenness during public events and sexual relationships outside of marriage. There was not much left of the old Anabaptist attempt to maintain a disciplined church community. For many, religion was little more than just part of their cultural tradition.

Of course not everyone was content with a spiritual life that bore little resemblance to the biblical faith of their Anabaptist forebears. As early as 1814 a group known as the *Kleine Gemeinde* (Small Community) separated from the majority Mennonite community. But the Mennonite Brethren were the most substantial reform movement that broke away from the mainstream Mennonite community in the colonies in Russia.

In order to introduce some of the dynamics in the origins and history of the MB movement, I will use the analysis (shared by many others) of MB theologian Lynn

Jost in *For Everything a Season*. (Paul Toews, ed., 2002). According to this widely held interpretation, three different theological streams converge in the history of the MBs: Anabaptism, pietism, and Baptist evangelicalism. MB theology, Lynn Jost says, is like a triangle, or a three-legged stool. Often the three legs of the stool provide mutual support for one another, but sometimes they are in conflict, and when their theological convictions were in conflict, it was their shared ethnic (cultural) identity that helped to hold the MBs together, at least through the first 140 years or so of their history. I will briefly describe the three theological traditions that helped to shape the origins and the subsequent history of the MBs.

## ANABAPTISM

I will begin with Anabaptism. In the brief (about two pages) “Document of Secession” that the 18 initial signers presented to the leaders of the established Mennonite authorities in Russia explaining why they felt that they had to separate from the larger Mennonite community, the MB signers refer to Menno Simons twice, once as “our beloved Menno” and, a second time to say that “in all other points we are in agreement with Menno Simons.” So in their own self-understanding, the early MB leaders thought of themselves as restoring their group to closer conformity to the teachings and activities of the early church as portrayed in the New Testament, just as their early Anabaptist and Mennonite forebears had done in the sixteenth century. With Menno and the Anabaptists, and unlike the compromised Mennonite churches around them in Russia, the early MBs wanted a disciplined church community where members who were in non-compliance with the teachings of the New Testament as understood by their church community would be confronted, and, if necessary, excluded from participation in communion and other activities in the life of the church (excommunication). The hope was that such disciplinary action would lead to repentance and restoration to fellowship with the community. And the leaders wanted to be part of a missionary-minded community where obedience to Jesus’ command to “go into all the world and make disciples” was taken seriously.

Of course interpretations of what it means to be Anabaptist and Mennonite have varied down through the decades, but continuity with what they understood to be the teachings of Menno Simons was valued by the founders of the MB movement, and Anabaptism has been important to at least some MBs throughout



the history of the denomination. Appreciation for the Anabaptist component of their eclectic spiritual heritage probably reached its highest point during the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s. During that period, a “restoration” of interest in Anabaptist history and theology that had begun in the 1940s and 1950s led to the almost complete replacement of the faculty in the MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno (Anabaptist-oriented scholars replaced the earlier fundamentalist-dispensationalist faculty). Continuity with the Anabaptist heritage is also apparent in MB participation in inter-Mennonite organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program during World War II, and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Anabaptist influences may also be seen in the most recent (1999) version of the Confession of Faith of the now defunct U.S. and Canadian General Conference of MB Churches, and in the statement of beliefs of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). Key words in the Anabaptist religious vocabulary are discipleship, community, and peace.

It must be acknowledged, however, that not all historians are convinced that the early MBs were truly committed to Menno and Anabaptist ideals. Abraham Friesen, for example, suggests that the early MBs did not really know very much about the teachings of Menno Simons. They were more interested in identifying themselves as sufficiently “Mennonite” to preserve their access to the privileges that had been granted to the Mennonites by the Russian government than they were in carrying forward the convictions of Menno Simons. Friesen and others also argue that MB identity was influenced more by pietism and evangelicalism than by any commitment to an Anabaptist vision.

## PIETISM

Pietism is the second of the three theological traditions that have helped to shape Mennonite Brethren identity. Pietism was part of an “awakening” of spiritual enthusiasm that spread across Western Europe, Great Britain, and North America beginning in the seventeenth century. Like the Anabaptists, pietists value reading the Bible and meeting together in small groups for prayer and Christian fellowship. They emphasize the importance of an emotional conversion experience, an intimate personal relationship with Christ, and a disciplined personal ethical life that is shaped by Bible reading and prayer, both in individual

periods of “devotions” or “quiet times” and in gatherings with others in small groups for Christian fellowship. Pietists also take seriously Jesus’ “Great Commission,” so they encourage personal witnessing about their faith and they are committed to supporting missions, both domestic and international. Some of the key terms for pietists are: the experience of being “born again,” the practice of a personal devotional life of Bible reading and prayer, a sense of a close personal relationship with Jesus, gathering with others in small group fellowship, and spreading the faith through personal witnessing and missionary activities.

Pietist influences arrived early in the Mennonite colonies in Russia. I will mention only a few of the many points of contact between the Russian Mennonites and European pietism. First, as noted above, Johann Oncken (1800-1884) was the leader of a Baptist seminary in Hamburg, Germany and the director of a German Baptist missionary organization. Oncken had connections with the Mennonite Doopsgezinde in Holland. He visited the Mennonites in Prussia in 1833 and the Mennonite Molotschna colony in S. Russia in 1858.

Second, Edward Wuest (1818-1859) was a pastor in a German Lutheran church near the Mennonite colonies in S. Russia. He visited the Mennonite colonies, preached in their churches, and encouraged the spiritual disciplines that are associated with pietism. Friedrich Wilhelm Lange (1800-1864) was a pious Lutheran school teacher in Prussia until 1837 when he, along with other members of his congregation, migrated to the village of Gnadenfeld in the Molotschna colony in Russia. He received Mennonite baptism, became a minister (1838) and was later (in 1841) ordained as elder in the Mennonite congregation in Gnadenfeld, where he encouraged small group gatherings in homes for prayer and Bible study, sponsored mission conferences and festivals, and he introduced new music and “singspirations.” Lange and Wuest were good friends and they together contributed to the warm spiritual atmosphere in the Gnadenfeld church community in which the MB movement was incubated.

Contentious disputes eventually arose between the “warmer” group of “brethren” and most of the established leaders of the Mennonite community (both the religious leaders and the colony administrators) who were concerned with maintaining order in both church and society. One of the divisive religious issues was whether the “brethren” group would be authorized to conduct their

own “closed” communion apart from the established church community (*kirchliche*). The “brethren” invited an “elder” from the Gnadenfeld congregation to conduct a communion service for only those who had experienced real bonds of love and fellowship and who were no longer practicing the “sins” that were being overlooked in the larger Mennonite church. When the elder refused to join them and the “brethren” were prohibited from conducting their own separate communion service without an elder, secession followed.

But since Mennonite “privileges” were granted by the Russian government to the “Mennonites,” a division within the colonies created the need for negotiating the legal status of the new sub-group. Were the “brethren” still Mennonites? Were they Baptists, Lutherans, or a new “sect”? Did the privileges granted to the Mennonite colonies as a whole still apply to the new separate group? It took some time before these matters could be resolved between the new group, who became known as the “Mennonite Brethren,” and the established Mennonite religious leaders, the colony administrators, and the Russian government. The Russian government finally recognized the MBs as Mennonites in March, 1880, twenty years after their secession.

Several problems typically arise when persons convert to a new religion or experience an intensely emotional spiritual renewal. First, boundaries between the old and the new are exaggerated. On the “old church” side, this meant harassment and persecution of the MBs that included beatings, imprisonment, and banishment from the colonies. Marriages conducted by MBs were not recognized as legal. The colony administrator, David Friesen, wanted to banish the entire MB community from the colonies, but this threat ended when an elder in the sympathetic Ohrloff congregation agreed to ordain one of the MB leaders as an elder, giving some official legitimacy to the MBs. On the MB side, they practiced their own “closed” communion from which other Mennonites or members of other denominations were excluded (though sometimes Baptists were allowed to participate) and the MBs prohibited intermarriage between their members and anyone outside their community, including other Mennonites. The MBs in Russia ended their requirement of “closed communion” in 1905 but in North America communion in MB churches was not open to members of other denominations until the 1950s. Prohibition of marriages between MBs and “outsiders” ended even earlier in Russia, in 1885, but in North America this

remained an issue as late as the 1930s and beyond. Another contentious issue was mode of baptism. After 1862, under Baptist influences, the MBs began to require baptism by immersion as the only acceptable mode, while the established group used sprinkling or pouring. In North America it was not until 1963 that MB congregations were permitted to accept into membership persons who had been baptized by a mode other than immersion.

Conflicts between the established Mennonites and the secessionist MBs had begun to ease by as early as 1875 when the first conference for dialog was held. In Russia, relationships between the two groups were mostly congenial and cooperative by around the turn of the century (1900). But in North America, in 1960, one hundred years after the separation, a representative from the General Conference of Mennonite Churches (the group with which most of the established church Mennonites from Russia became affiliated after their migration to North America) addressed the gathering of the North American General Conference of MB Churches in Reedley California. The GCs offered an official apology to the MBs for the “feelings, words and deeds” that had led to a century of separation. The statement acknowledged that there was a need for “spiritual renewal” in the Mennonite communities in Russia at the time of the separation and expressed the hope that in the future the two communities could develop closer bonds of fellowship and find more areas in which they could cooperate together. Near the end of the conference sessions, a response to the overtures of the General Conference Mennonites was unanimously adopted by the delegates. The response confessed that the MBs, too, were at fault for holding negative attitudes and expressed the hope for warmer relationships and greater cooperation in the future, but not much came of that. Old antagonisms die hard.

A second problem that often arises when a community of people experiences an intense spiritual renewal, including those inspired by pietism, is excessive emotionalism. During the early years of the MBs in Russia, there was a movement that was known as the *froehliche richtung*, or the “joyous” (or “exuberant”) movement. MB meetings were initially in homes, since they did not yet have worship centers, but Bible study and prayer were soon replaced with sharing of testimonies and loud shouting, clapping, dancing (with tambourine accompaniment), and singing of lively new songs. It did not help that, since their

meetings were in homes, the “brethren” used the colloquial “low German” language in their meetings rather than the more formal “high German” that was used in the schools and in the established churches, and, later, in MB churches, too. This new “freedom in Christ” also led to exchanges of the “brotherly and sisterly kiss” mentioned in the New Testament, but that got out of hand, leading to instances of sexual immorality. Excesses moved in the other direction, too, with rigid legalism and quick excommunications conducted by some of the MB leaders. One of the reasons that these unhealthy developments happened was that, for various reasons, the strong leaders were not available to offer corrective direction. MB leader Johann Klassen, for example, spent months and years in Moscow trying to negotiate with the Russian government official recognition for the new MB movement. But a series of reforms during June, 1865, ended the excesses and placed the MB movement on a different path.

#### BAPTIST-EVANGELICALISM

Which brings us to the third theological “leg” on the MB “three-legged stool”: evangelicalism. The impact of evangelicalism on the MBs is more difficult to identify, partly because definitions of the term have varied during different periods of history. “Evangelical” served as a synonym for “Protestant” during the Reformation, and it later came to refer to groups and individuals who are not “liberal” (or “modernist”), or Roman Catholic. During the nineteenth century there was a lot of overlap between pietism and evangelicalism. “Modernism” was not yet the divisive issue that developed later.

I will briefly review just a few of the influences that the German Baptist version of evangelicalism had on the early Mennonite Brethren. I have already mentioned the Baptist insistence on immersion as the only acceptable mode of baptism, which the MBs adopted as their own position. One of the emphases shared by most evangelicals is the importance of conversion, or being born again. Most evangelical groups believe that an informed, adult commitment to Christ and a Christian community are an important first step in the spiritual life of a Christian. Anabaptists (but not Lutheran and other evangelicals in the Reformed tradition) believed that baptism was not for infants but should follow as a symbol of this experience of new life in Christ, but most (including most of the major Mennonite denominations other than the MBs) accept sprinkling and pouring as appropriate

means for expressing this commitment. The long-standing MB commitment to immersion as the only acceptable mode of baptism began under the influence of the German Baptists.

I have mentioned that the *froehliche richtung* aberration in the early history of the MB movement happened partly because of an absence of strong spiritual and organizational leadership. I will briefly introduce just one of the German Baptist men who had an important influence in bringing order to the chaotic early MB movement.

A German Baptist visitor who had great influence on the early organization of the MBs in Russia was August Liebig (1836-1914). He was an ordained Baptist minister in Germany who first visited the colonies in 1866. He was sent by German Baptist seminary and mission leader, Johann Oncken, in response to a request from a group of MB leaders to help resolve some conflicts in their church. Liebig encouraged the MBs to record minutes of their meetings and to observe some of the basic rules of parliamentary procedure, such as that a speaker should stand to present a statement, should address the congregation and not be personal, and should not speak more than three times during a meeting. "God is a God of order," he said. Liebig was in the colonies for only two weeks before he was arrested and sent away by the established Mennonite authorities. Liebig visited the Mennonite colonies again in 1871, this time with his wife and daughter. They stayed for a full year and were again influential in helping the MBs with a variety of organizational matters, including financial record-keeping. He helped to initiate Sunday schools and a system of itinerant ministries that proved to be very helpful in creating and maintaining unity within the scattered MB fellowships in the Russian colonies, and, later, in North America. In 1872, when the Russian MBs gathered for their first meeting as a "conference," August Liebig was asked to chair their meetings.

In his chapter on "Distinctives in Mennonite Brethren Theology" in his book on the history of the Mennonite Brethren (1975), Canadian MB historian and theologian, John A Toews (1912-1979) listed the same three theological influences that have shaped the MB movement as Lynn Jost: Anabaptism, pietism, and Baptists. But then Toews added another series of characteristics of MB theological identity: Practical Biblicism; Experiential Faith; Personal Witnessing;

Brotherhood Emphasis; Evangelism and Missions; and Christ-centered Eschatology. This list of characteristics is typical of how many MBs have understood their theological identity down through the decades.

#### “OUTSIDE INFLUENCES”: FUNDAMENTALISM AND DISPENSATIONALISM

In his *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (1975), MB historian, Dr. J. A. Toews, identified two “Outside Influences on Mennonite Brethren Theology” about which he expressed concern: fundamentalism and dispensationalism. Fundamentalism, he says, was a reaction against modernism that focused narrowly on a select few theological emphases: e.g. biblical inerrancy; the virgin birth of Jesus; substitutionary atonement; imminent, bodily return of Jesus. Fundamentalism, Toews wrote, undervalued Christian community and Jesus’ ethic of love and peace. Toews concluded: “Fundamentalism has had a restricting influence on the gospel message as portrayed in the New Testament and has weakened the historic evangelical Anabaptist foundations of Mennonite Brethren faith and practice.” (376)

Dispensationalism was the second “Outside Influence” about which Toews was concerned. I think it is important to provide a fairly detailed description of dispensationalism because of its centrality in the early years of the MB mission in Japan and in the JMBC. Dispensational teachings were spread via the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909) that included many “Notes” on the biblical texts. Among other things, these notes taught that the “spiritual gifts” (tongues, healings, casting out demons) had ended with the Apostolic age; that a “young earth” had been created by God in 4004 BC; and the notes in Scofield’s Bible outlined seven stages or dispensations of God’s work on earth. Part of dispensational teaching was that Israel continues to have a special place in God’s plans for humanity. During these last days, according to dispensationalism, the primary, or even the *only* task of the church is to save souls from eternal damnation in hell. Dispensational teachings were also spread through the founding of several Bible institutes, including the Moody Bible Institute (1886) and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA) (1908), two schools where many MBs studied. Dispensational teachings found their way into the faculties and curricula of many other North American Christian colleges and seminaries, including many of the Bible Schools and Bible Institutes that were established by

the Mennonite Brethren in North America. Dispensational teachings also became influential in Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas (1908); the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg (1944); Pacific Bible Institute in Fresno, California, (also in 1944, later Fresno Pacific University), and the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno (1955).

In the words of MB historian John A. Toews, “Possibly no other theological system has influenced Mennonite Brethren theology during the last fifty years as much as dispensationalism. In the thinking of many Bible students, this form of Scripture interpretation is identified with premillennialism and even with true Biblicism.” (377) Dispensationalism had a strong influence on many evangelical missionaries, and that was true of MB mission personnel, including in Japan, as we shall see in Part Two. But, as MB historian J. A. Toews and others have pointed out, dispensational teachings were never included in any MB General Conference Confession of Faith.

#### DISPENSATIONAL ESCHATOLOGY

Because in the past, and to some degree still in the present, dispensational theology was so common in MB circles, and because for many years dispensational eschatology was central in the theological identity of the JMBC, I will provide a review of one widely held version of the dispensational view of the series of events that will happen in the end times.

“The Mennonite Brethren Church: A Brief Presentation of Its Origin, Doctrine and Objectives” is a 15 page booklet that was authored in 1965 by MB leader, Rev. H. H. Janzen (1901 -1975). Rev. Janzen served as a relief and mission worker in Europe with the MCC just after the end of World War II and later with the MB mission; as a pastor and teacher in Canada; as the moderator of both the Ontario Provincial and the North American MB General Conferences; and he also served as President of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, so he was certainly well qualified to present his own personal perspective on his denomination. As we shall see, Dr. Harry Friesen and other MB missionaries relied heavily on this small book and other “supplementary” documents to support their case that dispensationalism was part of MB theology, even though it was not explicitly included in any official MB Confession of Faith. As we will see in Part



Two, MB missionary, Harry Friesen, referred to this little book in his defense of the dispensational theology of the MB missionaries and the JMBC.

In his summary of the theology of the MB denomination, Rev. H. H. Janzen presented a sequence of eschatological events that includes many more details than are part of any of the official MB Confessions. He positioned the MBs more clearly in the camp of fundamentalism and dispensationalism than any of the official MB COFs, all of which left room for a variety of interpretations of the end times. Because of the importance of this eschatology in the thinking of many MBs, including the early MB missionaries in Japan and many pastors and members of the JMBC, I will quote in full Rev. Janzen's summary of the major events of the end times as he understood them. (Punctuation and underlining are Rev. Janzen's. In the interest of space, I have omitted most of his references to biblical texts.)

Concerning future events with mankind, we believe that the first redemptive event is the rapture of the church. All truly born-again Christians will have part in this. It occurs before the so-called "great tribulation" and ushers the believers before the judgement seat of rewards of Jesus Christ where each one "will receive according to how he has done during his earthly life, be it good or evil." Thereupon follows the time of tribulation, the "Day of the Lord" in which the Lord Jesus initiates His battle with the anti-Christian world, with the Antichrist and the false prophet. This ends with the complete conquest and overthrow of these powers and Satan, and with Christ's judging of the living nations, according to Matt. 25: 31 ff. Thereupon follows Christ's thousand year reign of peace which He Himself will establish upon earth. In this kingdom Christ will be the King who sits upon the throne of David and with Him the raptured Church of Christ with whom He has joined himself for eternity at the close of the time of tribulation at the marriage of the Lamb. Ransomed Israel, who after frightful suffering in the tribulation finally at the visible return of Christ receives Him as her Messiah, will be the leading and ruling nation among the peoples of the earth.

Once more Satan, who in the meantime has been briefly released after the Millennium from his confinement by God, will deceive humanity

and a great host will engage in an attack against Christ, His saints, and the holy city. Christ overcomes His enemies and God's last judgment of the human race now takes place at the great white throne. Here all those people who died in unbelief and those living in unbelief will be judged and banished together with Satan to eternal damnation.

We believe in an eternal damnation for unbelievers, from which there is no release. The smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever says the Lord in Revelation (Rev. 14:9-11).

Now appears the New Heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem in which the saved will serve the Lord in eternal blessedness.

Sometimes the three legs of the MB theological "stool" reinforced each other. Pietism can bring emotional warmth to Anabaptist commitments to discipleship, community, and peace-making. Evangelicalism can help give organizational and theological structure to the spiritual enthusiasm sometimes inspired by pietism. All three can bring new life to a religious situation that has been reduced to little more than ethno-religious traditionalism. But there can be conflicts, too. From an Anabaptist perspective, both pietism and evangelicalism are suspect because of their strong emphasis on individualism and subjectivity and their lack of commitment to the church as an alternative community of committed disciples of Jesus who follow the way of peace. Both are weak on a prophetic ethic. At least some historians think that the influence of pietism in the Russian colonies was one reason that some Mennonites were willing to organize their *selbstschutz* (self-defense forces) in spite of their long history of peaceful non-resistance.

Earlier generations of evangelicals were concerned about social issues such as ending the practice of slavery and working toward better social conditions for women and children but fundamentalists focused almost entirely on the salvation experiences of individuals and on personal ethics, such as no drinking, no smoking, no dancing, no card-playing, no movies. Advocacy for peace, social justice and better health care are not often on the agenda of most evangelicals. Both pietism and evangelicalism find it easy to be comfortable with political conservatism (what Robert Bellah called "American Civil Religion," and, even, "American Shinto," since both American evangelicalism and Japanese National Shinto provide teachings and practices that support nationalistic patriotism). In

fact, in the U.S. evangelicals constitute one of the most reliable bases for the conservative Republican Party, which enjoys the support of some 80% of white evangelicals.

In spite of some disagreements and conflicts, there has been a general consensus that the three major theological streams that have flowed together through most of MB history have blended together quite well. The MB three-legged theological stool has been pretty stable, for the most part at least. But there have been important MB leaders who have expressed deep concerns about the direction in which the denomination has moved in recent decades. One such leader was John B. (J.B.) Toews (1906-1998), to whom I will refer frequently in this report.

In 1995, when he was eighty eight years old, MB “patriarch” J. B. Toews published his autobiography, *JB: A Twentieth Century Pilgrim*. In the closing paragraphs of his book, J. B. Toews confessed that in the years following the end of World War II his “faith and commitment” had been “shaken to the utmost” by the changes that had taken place in his spiritual community.

Within a quarter century (1950-1975) a rural agricultural people was scattered into urban centers and integrated into a new milieu of professionalism. The central tenets of the church’s faith and practice were shaken to the core. The interdependent fellowship of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the midst of rampant individualism and pluralism, developed into an association retaining a structure of programs in missions and education but with little abiding commitment to being a people in the world but not of the world. American evangelicalism, preoccupied with “being saved” and garnering the benefits of the gospel without the attendant costs in ethics and lifestyle, became the dominant model. Following this trend of evangelicalism, “there is a de-emphasis of the more offensive aspects of the gospel: the nature of internal evil, sinful conduct and lifestyle, the wrath of a righteous and jealous God and external agony and death in hell.” The commitment to the absolutes of the Scripture in true discipleship—“take up the cross and follow me”—has become for many a mere matter of choice. Many years in leadership positions amid this environment created continuous tensions as I sought to remain true to my

understanding of Scripture. (*JB*, p. 206. His quotation is from James D. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, p. 87)

In a less prophetic and more scholarly mode, Reformation and Russian Mennonite historian, Dr. Abraham Friesen, presented a paper during a conference convened in 2010 in British Columbia to celebrate 150 years of MB history. In his paper, “Mennonite Brethren Beginnings: Background and Influences” (in Abe Dueck, ed., p. 83-102), Dr. Friesen documented the heavy influence of German Lutheran pietism and the German Baptists on the early MBs. But he was not so sure that Anabaptist and Mennonite influences played a strong role in giving shape to early MB theology. The secession document does refer to Menno Simons, but Friesen argued that there is evidence that the early MBs were familiar with only a few of Menno Simon’s writings, and he accuses the secessionist MBs of using Menno primarily to provide “proof texts” to justify their differences with the established Mennonites. “The Brethren approach appears to demonstrate that they were not looking for an Anabaptist or Mennonite theology, but merely to discover whether Menno agreed with them on certain points. What theology they had was more than likely drawn from pietism.” (95)

After listing the many influences that have shaped MB theology, including evangelicalism and fundamentalism in the U.S. during the twentieth century, Friesen concluded:

If one takes all of these theological movements that have impacted Mennonite Brethren into consideration, sometimes more powerfully, sometimes less, one is nearly compelled to argue that Mennonite Brethren have never had a solid theological rudder to steer their theological ship. And if that is the case, the early Mennonite Brethren did not absorb any kind of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology from Menno’s writings... From my perspective, it is high time this changed. It is high time that Mennonite Brethren develop a solid, comprehensive and Anabaptist theology. (99)

## MENNONITE BRETHREN CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

One might expect that questions regarding theological identity would be resolved with the adoption of a Confession of Faith (COF), but MB COFs have always been sufficiently open as to allow for diversity within the community. And, as J. B Toews and others have noted, MB organizational structures have long been weak

enough to allow for considerable congregational autonomy and individual interpretations. In addition, since the 1930s there have always been more than one version of MB COFs available, and even the official MB COF has been subject to change from time to time. Since the MB missionaries in Japan and the JMBC have taken their COF very seriously, I will present a brief review of the history and some of the content of MB COFs.

The first Confession of Faith that was adopted by the MBs in Russia shortly after their break from the “churchly” Mennonites was the West Prussian Mennonite Church Confession that had first been published in Holland in 1660. In order to emphasize their separate identity from the other Mennonites, in 1873 some MB congregations in Russia adopted a Baptist Confession that had been formulated in Hamburg, Germany in 1847 but that confession was never widely accepted by the denomination. In 1898 the MB Conference in Russia voted to establish a committee to revise their earlier Confession but, instead of a revision, an entirely new version was adopted in 1900 and printed in Russia in 1902. In that same year (1902) the MBs in North America adopted the new Russian MB Confession as their own. The 1902 MB COF was compiled from a variety of sources, some Anabaptist-Mennonite and some Baptist. Pietist influences are also evident throughout the 1902 Confession.

The 1902 MB COF was many pages long. It contained 6500 words and included 813 biblical references (117 Old Testament and 696 New Testament texts). Many of the 29 articles, including the article on eschatology, were little more than biblical quotations or paraphrases arranged in sequence, with biblical references following. The 1902 COF was not revised by the North American General Conference of MB Churches until 1975, 73 years after it was initially adopted, and, then, a second revised version was adopted in 1999, just prior to the dissolution of the Canadian-U.S. MB General Conference. So the 1902 COF was the official COF of the MB denomination during the time the JMBC was taking shape during the 1950s and 1960s.

Many things could be said about the 1902 MB COF but I will cite only two observations made by MBBS and Fuller Theological Seminary theologian, Dr. Howard Loewen, in his detailed comparative study of Mennonite Confessions of Faith (1985). “There is a clear note of ‘overagainstness’ and statements regarding

agreements and differences with the other Mennonites. It strongly defends the faith. Its emphasis on separation is unique in North American Mennonite confessions.” Loewen suggests that this separatist stance reflects the fact that the MBs had broken away from the larger Mennonite community in Russia in 1860, just 40 years earlier, so they were still concerned about defining and maintaining boundaries. Loewen also suggests that while the 1975 revision reflects continuity with the 1902 version, it also “reflects a broader identity than the 1902 Confession.” (32)

The COF that appears in the early JMBC Handbooks is not the document that was adopted in Russia and North America in 1902. That is probably just as well, since the original MB COF was long and complicated and it reflected the issues with which the young MB church was dealing during that long-ago time. There were several reasons why shorter versions of the MB COF were needed in North America. When the U.S., Canadian, Provincial, and District MB Conferences were registered as legal entities, documents of incorporation were required by the various jurisdictions in which they were located. So each Conference (General, National, Provincial and District) formulated its own “Constitution” which established their legal status in their locales. Almost all of these constitutions included one version or another of an abbreviated MB Confession of Faith. The long 1902 version was not appropriate for use in a concise legal document.

The first document of legal incorporation that I have been able to locate is the Constitution of the North American MB General Conference, written in German and adopted in 1909. That early document contains no Confession of Faith. A revised MB General Conference Constitution, also in German, was adopted in 1933. The revision includes a very brief, one paragraph summary of beliefs. This revised Constitution, including its brief summary of shared MB beliefs, was translated into English and adopted by the North American MB General Conference in 1936.

This short MB COF begins with a statement concerning the Bible. The COF simply states that the Old and New Testaments are “the Word of God and the only reliable guide of faith and life unto salvation.” All MBs shared this conviction and they also

adhere to the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. Of these there may be mentioned: Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; baptism by immersion upon personal confession of faith; the Lord's Supper and the washing of the saints' feet; non-resistance; the use of simple affirmations without the swearing of oaths; non-association with secret orders; abstinence from the use of tobacco and from alcoholic drinks and from everything that is contrary to a Christ-like life.

The 1936 statement adds two more points: It refers to the 1902 COF for a more complete statement of MB beliefs, and it states that no MB congregation or conference may adopt any resolutions that are "contrary to the teachings of the Bible and are in conflict with this confession." It is quite remarkable that this brief COF mentions matters such as footwashing, secret societies, tobacco and alcohol, but it says nothing at all about other traditionally foundational Christian doctrines such as the trinity, the nature of the church, and the "end times."

The COF in the 1945 Canadian Conference Constitution follows this very concise version of an MB COF and the COF of the Central District (1951) is similar, but slightly longer, elaborating briefly on the three Persons of the Trinity, for example, and adding a brief statement regarding eschatology.

The COFs in the Constitutions of the Pacific District (1951) and U.S. Conferences (1957) differ substantially from both the long COF of 1902 and the brief statements of the MB General, Canadian, and some of the provincial and district conferences. The COFs of the PDC (1951) and the North American MB General Conference (1957) are much shorter than the 1902 version but longer and more detailed than the earlier abbreviated COFs. I have not yet been able to locate any information about who authored these abbreviated COFs that first appeared in the 1951 PDC and then in the 1957 North American MB General Conference Constitutions, nor do I know anything about the process by which they were adopted. All of the various shortened versions of MB COFs of that era conclude with a statement to the effect that further details are available in the 1902 MB COF.

As far as I can tell, the COF that was translated into Japanese and appears in the JMBC Handbooks (dated 1970 and 1974) in the mission archives conforms most closely to the COFs in the Constitutions of the Pacific District Conference and the

North American General Conference of MB Churches, which are very similar to each other. The COF of the PDC and the JMBC translation differ slightly from the COF of the U.S. Conference. For example, both omit reference to the practice of footwashing that was historically included in Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions but was no longer in common practice.

It is my impression that the 1902 MB COF, even though it had a stronger tone of separatism and “overagainstness” than other Mennonite Confessions of Faith of that era, as suggested by Howard Loewen, it still left many matters of theology and practice open. The 1902 COF preferred to simply cite biblical texts and call for a practical Christianity rather than taking one side or another in disputed theological issues such as the nature of the inspiration of the Bible and the sequence of eschatological events.

The process of revising the 1902 COF of the North American MB General Conference began in 1966. The process was not completed until nine years later, in 1975, when the seventh draft was finally accepted by the Conference. The 1975 revision was much shorter (2450 words instead of 6500) and contained fewer biblical references (137 instead of 813). There were 16 articles instead of 29. Another revision of the MB COF was adopted by the North American General Conference in 1999. It was longer (4850 words) and contained more biblical references (415) than the 1975 version. Acceptance of the 1999 version was completed much more quickly than the 1975 revision (from 1997 to 1999) because the leaders of the process wanted to finalize adoption prior to the dissolution of the MB General Conference in 2000. (Statistics are from Heidebrecht in Dueck ed., p.141-154)

Adoption of the new 1999 MB COF was not without controversy. I will mention only two of the several questions that were raised in a series of articles on the revision process in the MB journal *Direction* during the spring of 1998.

Reformation and Mennonite historian Dr. Abraham Friesen pointed out that both the 1975 COF and the revisions proposed in 1998 contained fewer references to the legacy of Menno Simons than were included in the 1902 version. This diminished the importance of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage that had been valued by the MBs in both Russia and North America. J. B. Toews pointed out in an earlier article in *Direction* (July 1981) that when MBs distance themselves from



their Anabaptist-Mennonite roots, they become more susceptible to the influence of American fundamentalism. According to Toews, the “spirit of tension, suspicion and open attack historically characteristic of American fundamentalism against those who do not share its creedal and eschatological formulations is today very prevalent in some of our circles.” These are “symptoms of an advanced condition of spiritual malnutrition,” he wrote. (29)

Fresno Pacific University philosopher Delbert Wiens argued in the 1998 issue of *Direction* that a COF should address the issues that were being faced by the church in its various historical and cultural contexts. The early creeds of the church, for example, responded to questions arising from Arianism and the dualistic Greek philosophy upon which it was based. In the incarnation, Jesus brought together the ideal, spiritual realm above and the earthly, material, and physical here below. Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. But the new MB COF, Wiens argued, did not resolve the issues of its day. The articles were sufficiently vague that they could be embraced by persons who hold fundamentally different world-views. Furthermore, since MBs do not really have on-going “liturgical or educative” uses of creedal statements, the words of a COF are mostly forgotten once they are adopted. The *process* of revision is more important than the product. The COF once adopted will not really help to hold the denomination together in communal solidarity, but perhaps forums for conversation about these matters will help us to better understand one another in our diversity and, therefore, help us to live together in greater faithfulness.

Doug Heidebrecht reflected on these and other concerns. A COF, he said, reflects the consensus of a community on how to interpret and apply the teachings of the Bible, so it should be used actively in the teaching ministries of the church. It should not just sit on a shelf. In a context of diversity and change, the question of the “binding,” or “normative” nature of a COF becomes an issue. How much disagreement with or deviance from a COF is permissible for an individual member or a congregation? In 1987 the BORAC of the MB General Conference adopted a statement that proclaimed that they desired “principled confessional integrity but not a legalistic confessional rigidity.” BORAC did not explain what this means. Heidebrecht concluded with the opinion that relationships are more important than the COF itself. In cases of disagreement, we should “walk toward

each other,” not away from relationships. (Heidebrecht in Abe Dueck, ed., p.146-151)

Some of the complexities and controversies about MB theological identity traveled along with MB missionaries as they journeyed “to the ends of the earth,” including to Japan. It is to the story of MB missions that we turn next.

## 6. MENNONITE BRETHERN MISSIONS

An observation that is frequently made is that pietism and the missionary movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were closely associated. They developed together in the same times and in the same places. This was true of the pious renewal movement in the Mennonite colonies in Russia that later became the Mennonite Brethren denomination. Almost everyone who writes about the early history of the MBs notes that enthusiastic support for mission programs characterized the movement from very early in its history. That was true of the MBs in Russia in the 1860s and it was true of the MBs who migrated to North America beginning in 1874.

The importance of missions in the history of the MBs is made clear in the opening paragraph of a chapter on MB missions written by Canadian and American MB leader, Dr. James Pankratz:

Mission is at the center of Mennonite Brethren identity. It was an impulse in the formation of the denomination in 1860. It was the dominant theme in the work and meetings of the General Conference for 120 years. From 1880 to 1948 the first item of business on the conference agenda was always mission (evangelism, home mission and foreign mission). Mission always received a greater amount of financial support from Mennonite Brethren churches than any other cause. Since the 1880s, most of the major Mennonite Brethren leaders in North America have at some time in their public ministry been missionaries, evangelists, church planters or mission board members. (Paul Toews, ed., *For Everything a Season*, p. 67)

## BEGINNINGS IN RUSSIA

The story of MB missions really begins with the Mennonites in Holland. As I have mentioned, the Dutch *Doopsgezinde* was the first Anabaptist-Mennonite

community to experience relief from persecution. They were the first to be allowed to practice their faith publically and they were the first to establish their own mission organization. After a visit from a representative of the British Mission Society, individual members of the *Doopsgezinde* contributed to the support of their programs. In 1821 the Dutch Mennonites organized their own “Holland Aid Society” to offer a more formal means for providing financial support for missionaries who were sent by the British Mission Society. The Holland Aid Society also provided a mechanism through which Mennonites in other countries, including Germany, Switzerland, and Russia, could support foreign mission activities. In 1847, after about 25 years of supporting Baptist missionary activities, the *Doopsgezinde* formed their own Dutch Mennonite Mission Society to provide support for their own mission programs. In 1851 they sent Pieter Jansz, their first Dutch Mennonite missionary to Java in what is now Indonesia. The Mennonites in Russia continued to channel their financial support for missions through the Dutch organization until 1860 when they formed their own Russian Mennonite mission organization. By that time (1860), the Mennonites in Russia had sent fourteen missionaries to the Dutch Indies. Enthusiasm for missions among the Mennonites in Russia was centered in Gnadenfeld and Ohrloff, two of the congregations that had been deeply influenced by German pietism and two of the villages that provided fertile ground for the emergence of the “brethren” renewal movement in 1860.

The early years of the MB movement were characterized by conflicts with the established Mennonite church, negotiations with both Mennonite and Russian governmental authorities, and by the internal turmoil associated with the “charismatic” *froehliche richtung* movement. Numerical growth was slow, partly because of out-migration of new members to North America and to “daughter colonies” in other parts of Russia. In 1872 there were only about 200 members of the MB church in the colonies. In the early years the MBs met in homes for worship, Bible study, prayer and fellowship. The first designated MB meeting place was located in a saloon that had been “converted” into a meeting place in 1867 in the centrally located village of Rueckenau in the Molotschna colony.

The early MBs participated in the “mission festivals” that were held in the Gnadenfeld church but in 1867 the MBs gathered in a large warehouse for their own first mission festival, so interest in missions began early. It was not until 1872

that the MBs, scattered in villages in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies, were ready to gather for their first “conference.” One of the first items on their agenda was what to do about evangelism and mission. Because membership in the MB church in Russia was still small in 1872, they were not yet in a position to open their own foreign mission field. Relationships between the break-away MB church and the older established Mennonite churches did not begin to heal until 1875 when the first in a series of dialog meetings took place, so the MBs did not channel their early missionary interests through the Russian Mennonite Mission Society.

During the first MB conference in Russia in 1872, a decision was made to establish an itinerant ministry that would focus on communities where there were already MB gatherings. The five visiting ministers would seek to provide support for the fledgling MB congregations, but they would also attempt to evangelize others in the local communities where the groups of MBs were located. A controversial issue during the first MB conference in 1872 (and in the years following) was whether their evangelistic efforts should include reaching out to local Russian citizens. The “privileges” that the Russian government extended to the Mennonite colonists were contingent on their compliance with the agreement that the Mennonites would not proselytize Russian citizens, who were almost all baptized (as infants) members of the Russian Orthodox Church. Persons who violated this agreement were subject to losing their right to own property, imprisonment, and exile to Siberia.

There were those who argued that “it is better to obey God rather than men” and that meant that Jesus’ “Great Commission” to preach the gospel to “all men” surely included the Russian people who lived in the colonies as employees of the Mennonites or in nearby villages. Others felt that the agreement that the Mennonites had made with the Russian government should be honored and evangelization of the Russian people should be left to others. During their first conference in 1872 the MBs took the position that they should *not* establish formal programs of outreach to Russian citizens. Of course informal witnessing happened and a few Russian people were converted but they did not join Mennonite churches since Russians were prohibited by law from joining Mennonite churches. Russian converts were encouraged to join Baptist churches because the Baptists did not have the same special status with the Russian

government that the Mennonites enjoyed. Many MBs were active in helping the Baptists in their efforts to evangelize the Russian people. More formal efforts to evangelize Russian people were organized later, but this all came to an end with the cataclysmic events of World War I and the Russian Revolution.

Interest in foreign mission programs among the MBs in Russia was encouraged through mission festivals, visiting preachers, circulation of literature, etc. By 1885 as many as 1000 persons were attending special MB mission festival celebrations. The first missionary sent by the Russian MB church was Abraham Friesen (1859-1919) and his wife, Maria. Abraham Friesen was the son of a “wealthy manufacturer” who volunteered for missionary service, even though this represented a substantial sacrifice on the part of both Abraham and his father. In 1885 the MBs agreed to support the 26 year old Friesen in his studies and subsequent missionary service. After studying in the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, Germany, the Friesens were sent to India in 1889. Their work was sponsored and financed by the MBs in Russia, but they worked under the organizational umbrella of the American Baptist Mission Union (AMBU) with headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts.

As was usually the case under the “comity” system that was common mission practice in those days, the MBs were assigned by the Baptist Union to a specific territory for which they would be entirely responsible. No other organization would engage in mission work in the MB field. The MB mission field was Nalgonda in the southern part of India, not far from the city of Hyderabad. The field was 6000 square miles in area with a population of approximately 700,000 people living in 2000 villages. Additional MB missionaries were sent to join the Friesens in the following years and they established a number of missionary “stations” or “compounds” in their “field.” Their mission facilities eventually included a sanctuary with seating for 700 persons, a hospital, a school for boys, a school for girls, and residences for the missionaries. All of the buildings were designed and constructed by the missionaries.

Administration of these early MB mission efforts in India were complicated and sometimes contentious. Finances flowed from both Russia and North America, sometimes directly and sometimes via the AMBU offices in Boston. Personnel, too, came from both Russia and North America. It is easy to understand why

there were sometimes conflicts over control of funds and direction of missionary assignments.

MB missionary efforts in Nalgonda were quite successful, but disastrous WW I and the communist revolution made it impossible for the Russian MBs to continue their support for their mission work in India, so the American Baptists resumed responsibility for continuing the work of building the church in the Nalgonda field.

#### EARLY NORTH AMERICAN MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSION ACTIVITIES

The first North American MB organization charged with leadership in evangelism and outreach was a “Home Missions Committee” appointed in 1889. It was this committee that oversaw the work of the itinerant ministers who contributed greatly to the spiritual and numerical growth of the MB churches during the early years.

#### Comanche, India, and Expanding Fields

The first MB Foreign Missions Committee was appointed in 1885. Initially their responsibility was simply to administer the mission funds that were gathered in MB churches. They forwarded these funds to the missionary work of other organizations in India and Africa. In 1894 the Foreign Missions Committee was not ready to assume responsibility for a foreign “field” of their own so they sent the Henry Kohfelds to begin work among “heathen living in spiritual darkness” nearer to home: the Comanche Indians in the southwestern state of Oklahoma. It was this committee that was later responsible for sending the first MB missionaries from North America to India in 1898.

The restructuring of the MB General Conference that happened in 1909 ended General Conference responsibility for home mission programs since these were assigned to the newly created district conferences. The Foreign Missions Committee provided leadership for the expanding MB foreign mission programs until 1936 when a new five-member Board with an Executive Secretary was appointed to provide administrative support for the Board.

New “fields” were added to India in fairly rapid succession: North China in 1906; South China in 1919; and Congo in 1922. During the decade following World War II, new fields were added at an accelerated pace that averaged approximately one new field every two years: Colombia and Paraguay in 1945; Brazil in 1949; Japan,

Peru and Mexico in 1950; Germany in 1952; Austria and Ecuador in 1953; Panama in 1956. An additional thirteen fields were added during the years 1968 through 1994. During the fifteen year period, 1945 to 1960, the MBs sent out 206 new missionaries.

Financial contributions also increased from just under \$200,000 in 1945 to nearly \$640,000 in 1960. By the early 1990s, the mission budget was over \$5,300,000. Financial support for foreign missions not only increased, but how the funds were distributed also changed. In 1925, 58% of the funds donated for foreign missions were designated for the support of a specific person or program. By 1965, only 5% of mission funds were designated. 95% of mission expenditures were at the discretion of the Board, reflecting a greater degree of confidence in the Board to use mission funds to the best strategic advantage. However, this trend was reversed during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s so that by the turn of the century virtually all MB missionaries were supported by “relational funding,” meaning that individual missionaries were responsible for soliciting funds for their own support, plus a portion of the costs of administering the foreign mission program.

I will briefly review the stories of only two (in addition to Japan later) of the thirty fields in which MBs have had mission programs: North (and West) China and South China. I will review this history because these fields illustrate the early MB approach to missions and because two members of the initial team of MB missionaries in Japan, Jonathan Bartel and Roland Wiens, had their beginnings on these fields.

#### Bartel Missions: North and West China Fields

Henry C. Bartel (1873-1965), Jonathan’s father, was a member of the Krimmer (Crimean) Mennonite Brethren (KMB) denomination. The KMBs had their origins in 1869 in a revival movement among Mennonites who had migrated from the old colonies in Russia down to the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea. Most members of the KMB community migrated from Russia to the American mid-west beginning in 1874. The KMBs mostly supported missionaries who served under other organizations but they initiated some programs of their own, including the churches that they planted among African Americans in North Carolina in the U.S., beginning in 1900. The KMBs tended to be somewhat theologically and culturally

conservative. The small KMB denomination formally merged with the Mennonite Brethren in 1960.

Henry Bartel went to the Honan-Shantung area in north China in 1901. He was an independent missionary who was supported by an autonomous Board, the China Mennonite Mission Society that was organized in 1906 to support the Bartels' work in China. MBs served on this Board and members of MB churches also served with the Bartels on their mission field. Bartel and his Board requested that the MBs adopt his work as their own but the Bartels' work in North China was not adopted by the MB Foreign Missions Committee until 1906 because the MBs were occupied with their mission to the Comanche Indians and their growing mission work on their large field in India. As Jonathan Bartel reported, mission work in North China was quite successful:

Eventually six city churches and many village churches, all with national pastors and evangelists, were established on this field with a total membership of around two or three thousand. A Bible school was also operated on the Shantung field with Loyal Bartel as principal. In 1940 some 70 students were enrolled. Bartels also had an orphanage during the first years of the work. Many pastors and evangelists came from these orphans. (cited in J. A. Toews, p. 406)

Because of political unrest and military activities in their area, early in the 1940s the Bartels relocated to the more remote Shensi and Kansu area in west China. The MB Board of Foreign Missions adopted this west China field in 1945, but, the political unrest reached this remote area, too, so all MB missionaries except one had left the west China field by 1951.

Loyal Bartel, son of the founders, older brother of Jonathan, and former principal of the Bible school, chose to remain on the North China field. He purchased a parcel of land so that he was officially a "farmer" and not a missionary. Loyal Bartel was one of a very small number of foreigners who remained in China through the tumultuous early years of communist rule under Mao, including the "cultural revolution." In spite of repeated requests that he visit his family in the U.S. or meet them in Japan, he never saw his family again. Loyal Bartel died in China in 1971.



## Wiens Mission: South China Field

In 1911 Frank J. Wiens (1880-1942), Roland's father, felt "called" to missionary service in China. He requested support from the MB Foreign Missions Board but his request was denied because MB priorities were to strengthen their work in their mission field in India. Wiens then visited churches in North America before traveling to Russia where he successfully solicited funds for support from the MB churches there. The Wiens family then travelled by train across Siberia and by ship to Fukien province in south China where they began mission work among the Hakka people. Wiens persisted in his attempts to gain the support of the MB Board of Foreign Missions and he was finally successful in 1919.

Wiens established two mission stations in and near the city of Shantung, which had a population of about 40,000 at that time. The mission station inside the city walls included a small missionary residence, with playground space for the missionary children, a Bible school and boarding house for the students, a church, and a home for the elderly. Phyllis Martens, in her *The Mustard Tree* ((1971), described the larger mission station located about one kilometer outside the city walls:

The compound outside the city gate was built up more extensively: Bible school, boy's school, girls' school, a large missionary residence and other homes, small hospital, cow and chicken barn, store rooms, and a well. Here was built an impressive brick church (with seating for about 600, a new organ, etc.). (51)

Most of the expenses for these buildings were covered by donations from the local believers in Shantung. In addition, Martens reported, by 1932 there were 14 outstations, many with their own church buildings. Missionary Wiens also initiated several ventures that were intended to improve the economic condition of the people. He imported some Holstein cattle to establish a dairy and he acquired materials to begin a silk industry, but both of these attempts ended in failure.

There are dramatic accounts of both Frank and Agnes Wiens attempting to facilitate communications between warring parties, but because of rising concerns about safety, the missionaries left the area in 1927. Frank J Wiens returned to his field in 1935, only to find that most of the buildings had been

destroyed. He left China again in 1940. Roland M and Ann Wiens were sent to the field in South China in 1947, but they were forced to leave again in 1951, at which time they were transferred to the newly opened MB mission field in Japan.

## CHANGING MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSION POLICIES AND PRACTICES.

### Mission Compounds

Most early MB missionaries followed the pattern of mission activity that they had learned in their seminary programs. This was the approach that was used by many mission organizations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The pattern was not changed until as late as after the Second World War. Like their colleagues in other mission organizations in India, China, Africa and elsewhere, MB missionaries built mission “stations,” or “compounds.” As was the case in the MB missions in China, these mission stations occupied sizable plots of land, often surrounded by walls, and they typically included schools, hospitals, a pharmacy, residences for missionaries, students and others, and, often, they provided a variety of services for persons in need, such as orphans and the elderly. They sometimes included model farms or industries, such as F.J. Wiens’ experiment in south China with a dairy and the production of silk. They provided employment for local people and support for the evangelists who traveled out into the outlying villages.

Not all MB mission compounds were on this grand a scale, but in 1950 mission administrator A. E. Janzen described what he found on the large Kafumba station in Zaire (Congo). The station occupied 168 acres. There was a primary school, a teacher training school, a Bible School, a hospital, a clinic, and a printing press. Ten missionaries and their families lived and worked on the compound, along with 51 national workers and their families, all employed by the mission. A total of about 500 persons resided on the station, including the missionaries and national workers and their families and the students in the various schools. Other buildings were added during the next decade, but in 1950 there were 55 buildings on the compound, including structures for the institutions, residences for the workers, and other supporting auxiliary buildings. (J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 1978, p. 79) When MB mission administrator, A. E. Janzen, visited the mission in India in 1950, he photographed 200 buildings on the

several MB compounds in that country, all financed with funds from North America.

On the positive side, the compound approach represented concern for the whole person: body, mind and spirit. They represented not only interest in the spiritual well-being of the people around them, but they were also designed to meet the educational, medical, social, and economic needs of their communities. They reflected the belief that “spiritual” change apart from the creation of a new community and a new way of life did not really mean very much and did not usually last very long. On the negative side, the mission compounds represented a mission version of colonialism and, in too many cases, they created dependency on the part of the people who received the services provided by the missionaries and their staffs on the compounds. The paternalistic relationship between the missionaries and the nationals inhibited rather than facilitated the development of autonomous Christian communities that would mature into “indigenous” (“self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating”) national churches. It was generally assumed that the relationship between the missionary and native was like the relationship between parent and child, and that the missionary would serve in this paternalistic role for as long as he/she lived. In fact, according to the *Guiding Principles and Field Policies* that were adopted by the MB Board of Foreign Missions in 1947, “The need for fathers in Christ among the national believers always remains and the missionary is seen in the role indefinitely.” (cited by J. B. Toews in *Pilgrimage*, p. 262)

### Indigenous Churches: The Three “Selfs”

Because of these (and many other) negative outcomes from the missionary-centered “station” approach to missions, by 1947 MB mission leadership was ready to move in a new direction. In the judgement of MB mission administrator A. E. Janzen, the mission-centered approach to mission “was a deviation from the Biblical pattern.” (A. J. Klassen, ed. *The Church in Mission*, 1967, p. 160). That new direction was first articulated in 1947 in a document, *Guiding Principles and Field Policies*. According to the new *Guiding Principles*, “It shall ever be the endeavor of all of our foreign mission activities ... to unite the local churches into an organized conference or convention, which shall become a church that continues the propagation of the Gospel in its area (“self-propagating”), directs and regulates its

own church affairs (“self-governing”), and meets its own financial responsibilities” (“self-supporting”).”

Among many other changes that were implemented over a period of years, the new policies moved decision-making authority away from the founding or senior missionary on a station to an administrative committee that included representation from all of the missionaries on the field. Decision-making on the fields was democratized, but the power still remained with the missionary body.

The implications of moving away from the old station-centered approach were evident in 1950, when the Board sent instructions to the newly arrived missionaries on the new MB mission field in Japan.

They were given specific instructions not to start a station pattern and not to build churches on mission property. Churches were to be built on national church property, not on mission property. Missionaries were to live in missionary residences, but churches or schools were not to be attached to missionary housing in the form of compounds. Churches and their location were to be a distinct function of the national church. The program was to revolve around the national church, not around the mission, its subsidy, nor a compound. Thus the Mennonite Brethren Mission in Japan has no mission compounds or stations, nor do the other fields where mission endeavor was developed since 1950. (A. E. Janzen, op. cit. p. 173):

The days of the mission-centered, compound approach to mission were coming to an end, but adjustments came hard on some of the old fields, especially in India. Peter Penner tells the often tragic story of MB mission work in India in his long and detailed (413 pp.) *Russians, North Americans, and Telegus: The Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1885-1975* (1997).

### Partnership

A further major development in mission policy was formalized in 1957 when the MB General Conference, meeting in Yarrow, British Columbia, approved a new statement of *Principles and Policies*. All mission activity should be devoted to the support and development of national churches, not focused on the mission itself. One implication of this was that decision-making power was shifted from the

administrative committees (Missionary Councils) on the fields to the Board of Foreign Missions in Hillsboro, Kansas. The days of a paternalistic parent-child relationship between the missionaries and the national churches on the fields were over. The new watch-word was “obedience in partnership,” and it was the central mission administration in North America that was the facilitator and coordinator of these new partnerships, not the missionaries on the field. The former missionary administrative committees on the fields became missionary fellowships without decision-making power in matters related to the national church bodies. In the words of a report to the MB General Conference in 1962 (cited in Pankratz, op. cit. p. 76):

From here on all work must be planned with the conference (of the country of ministry); all workers must be called and approved by and integrated into this conference; all finances, except the personal allowances of missionaries, must be channeled through this conference; and all institutions must be staffed and directed by the conference. Complete partnership must be accomplished in every area.

Needless to say, directives such as this were met with great consternation by some of the senior missionaries who were sure that God had called them to life-long service in the old paternalistic pattern. Some of these senior missionaries were called back “home” from their fields, over their personal objections and the objections of at least some of their supporters. In the words that I heard from one missionary, “I know what God has called me to do, and that is not to carry a briefcase for a national pastor.”

### Internationalization

Around the turn of the century (2000), internationalization of the global Mennonite Brethren community took the form of the International Committee (later Community) of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). ICOMB eventually replaced the North American board of foreign missions as the primary conduit for conference-to-conference relationships. Concurrent with the development of ICOMB was a substantial reorientation of the foreign mission work of the North American MB Conferences. First, the combined Canadian-U.S. General Conference was “dissolved.” After the final “dissolution” of the General Conference in 2002, the two national conferences (Canada and the U.S.) continued to cooperate in the

work of what became known as Mennonite Brethren Mission (MBM). The focus of MBM changed to give high priority to the “unreached” people groups in the “10-40 window”; to outreach to Muslims; and from long-term to shorter-term mission service. The small number of long-term missionaries and the short-term services of English teachers and small teams of young people who visit Japan during the summer reflect this change in North American MB mission priorities, as do arrangements through which members of the JMBC serve as foreign missionaries under a cooperative arrangement with the MBM.

### Issues and Challenges

All of these (and many other) changes inevitably led to some misunderstandings, frustrations, and conflicts. Some of the national conferences felt that they had been abandoned by their missionary “parents.” Transfers of ownership of what were formerly mission properties to national church bodies led to serious and long-standing disagreements and, even, legal disputes. Some conferences were under-prepared to assume responsibility for ownership of programs and institutions that had received subsidies from abroad while they were under mission control. In many cases, the national conferences did not have the resources of either finances or trained personnel to carry on the costly and complicated projects that had been offered on the old mission compounds. As we will see, the mission board’s determination that national churches should assume responsibility for their own affairs was one factor that contributed to the end of the cooperative Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS) in Japan. Disruptions were much greater and more long-lasting in India.

Change away from the patriarchal, colonial pattern of mission was necessary because the end of World War II brought with it the end of the old colonial system. Nation-states were no longer willing to remain subject to domination and exploitation by the western powers. And with political independence came demands for greater autonomy on the part of church communities as well. Church leaders throughout the non-western world were no longer willing to remain under the control of western mission agencies.

But there were internal reasons for changing the old system as well as the external political reality of the end of colonialism. When a missionary’s ministry, and even economic support for the family, is dependent upon the willing

contributions of donors, it is tempting to over-dramatize the work, exaggerate the positive outcomes, and under-state the failures. When mission work was glorified as it was among the MBs and the supporting constituencies of many other mission agencies, it was difficult to conduct an honest evaluation of what the missionaries were actually accomplishing. Canadian MB leader, Bruce Guenther (in Vic Wiens, ed. 2015), commented as follows:

The story, however, is not without difficulties: the sacrosanct status of the missionary mandate has meant that mission initiatives have not always been transparently assessed for fear that commitment and motivation of volunteers or donors might be diminished. Along with considerable achievements resulting from MB missionary endeavors in both Canada and beyond, there are occasional examples of insensitivity, inflated reports of success, exploitive use of religious language (“white-unto-harvest,” “fast-closing doors,” etc.) to generate financial support, and pragmatic, impulsive decision-making practices that sometimes resulted in unnecessary conflict and wasted resources. (175)

Guenther was not the only person who was concerned that mission administrators sometimes presented distorted pictures of what was actually happening on the fields. Some thirty years after he ended his ten year term as MB mission administrator, MB “patriarch” J. B. Toews wrote his own version of MB history, *Pilgrimage of Faith* (1993). Of course he included his own reflections on the MB mission programs that he had directed. In a section that he called “Bandwagon Publicity,” J. B. Toews wrote about how mission administrators often gave misleading reports to their constituencies.

Published reports speak of progress, open doors and the need for more missionaries. The appeals are justified. The needs are there; the harvest is ripe and the reapers are few.

Mission, however is also the battle ground of light and darkness, with problems and reverses... Mission appeals contain a great deal of truth but not the whole truth. They are one-sided. Yes, missions are experiencing success and people are finding Christ. But there are also serious problems...

While “bandwagon” reporting may prove profitable for fundraising, the reality is distorted. The churches at home do not receive an accurate

picture of what is actually happening in the mission they are asked to support. (268-270)

As one example of the kind of inflated use of language that Guenther and Toews might have been talking about, I will cite a brief section from the report of mission administrator A. E. Janzen as recorded in the MB General Conference *Yearbook* for 1951.

The picture presented by heathendom cannot be described. It is a miracle of God that from such darkness the Gospel can rescue glowing disciples for Jesus. The most precious sight on all fields are the faces of those heathen who have been transformed into believers, those who comprise the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in those lands. (35)

Rev. Janzen went on to report to the Conference that contributed monies “yield their most heavenly treasure in foreign missions.” The periodic “prayer letters” sent by missionaries to family, friends, and people who supported them financially and with prayers were filled with similar language.

A related problem was that when missionaries are idealized and even idolized as spiritual giants and heroic role models who serve at great personal sacrifice, that takes a toll on the spiritual and psychological well-being of the missionaries themselves. It is hard to live a healthy human life while perched atop a pedestal. In his concluding autobiographical “Reflections” on his ten years of service as mission administrator, MB “patriarch” J.B. Toews wrote as follows in *JB: A Twentieth-Century Mennonite Pilgrim* (1995):

Missionaries are not saints. Their calling requires continuous affirmation and spiritual nurture. In general they are a lonely people, often separated from their children and extended family. Singles feel this isolation most keenly. Maintaining a continuous sense that their assignment is a service unto the Lord is difficult. The weakening of this priority expresses itself in personal spiritual struggles which generate many tensions in inter-personal relationships. *Providing a spiritual ministry to the missionaries, though rewarding, constituted the most difficult aspect of my ten years in mission leadership.* (Emphasis mine.) (165):



To be fair, it is important to recognize that providing administrative leadership to a mission program was a very large, difficult, and complicated assignment for a board and its administration. For many years the MB mission board consisted of 15 members, assisted by administrative and other staff. *All* of the members of the board were male and all were either ministers or teachers in MB schools. Many of the same men served as members of the board for many years. The board routinely met two times a year for three days. Reports, resolutions, minutes, budgets, etc. increased in volume as the mission program grew in size and complexity. Written records of board meetings often reached more than 200 pages in length. Items on the agenda typically ranged from adopting mission statements and policy manuals, to decisions about engine repairs on mission vehicles in India, to dealing with interpersonal conflicts between missionaries, and between missionaries and national church leaders. The board made decisions about retirement plans, vacation and deputation schedules, schooling and other support for missionary children, accepting (and rejecting) candidates for missionary service, and adopting budgets that, hopefully, reflected board and denominational priorities. The board also developed strategies for communicating with congregations and individual church members, encouraging them to support the mission program with prayers, people and money, and they developed written and other media materials to help reach their goals. The members of the board shared devotional messages and sang hymns together (sometimes in German). All of this was further complicated by the vast cultural differences that existed between the North American MB board members and the many diverse “fields” of missionary service scattered around the globe.

To further illustrate the point made by Bruce Gunther, J. B. Toews (citations above) and others, the board did not always get everything right. The board triumphantly rejoiced during the decade of the 1960s when the mission program was expanding very rapidly (including doubling the mission staff in Japan) so that by the late 1960s the number of MB missionaries had reached more than 240. It was easy to celebrate the many souls won and churches planted, and to see the “hand of God” in all of this. But also by 1969, the MB mission program had accumulated a debt of more than \$640,000. Inflation and emergencies (e.g. evacuating missionaries from Congo during a revolution) had increased expenditures above what had been anticipated and the supporting constituency

had not provided the income to which the MB General Conference had committed itself when budgets for the mission program were adopted by the conference. The board had not been entirely honest with themselves or with the supporting constituency, so that in 1969 they had to acknowledge the fact that the program was in serious financial difficulty and that they needed to “come clean” about the situation for the first time in six years. After an emergency meeting with the Board of Trustees of the MB General Conference, the mission board committed itself to reduce expenditures, adopt better accounting practices, and make a concerted effort to increase fund-raising to eliminate the debt (which consisted mostly of money borrowed from other MB programs and individuals). The board succeeded in doing this.

### Third-culture Children

One additional “by-product” of the foreign missionary enterprise is the creation of a contingent of “third-culture” children. Along with the children of other expatriates (e.g. government officials, business people, scholars, artists, professional athletes), the children of missionaries often grow up without a real cultural “home.” They are “foreigners” in the cultures where their parents live and work, and they are strangers in their own native lands because of long periods of absence and exposure to experiences unknown to their relatives and friends back in their “home” communities. MB missionary-anthropologist Paul Hiebert, who grew up in both India and America, is quoted as saying that his only real “home” was in an airplane flying between India and America. Many of these “third-culture” children become highly creative and productive human beings, but there are also too many instances of a life-long sense of confused personal, social, cultural and spiritual identity.

## TENSIONS BETWEEN EVANGELISM/MISSION AND SOCIAL MINISTRIES

### The Split between the “Spiritual” and “Material” Worlds

An issue that has troubled church leaders, including the Mennonite Brethren, for many years is the relationship between “spiritual” ministries of proclamation of the Gospel in evangelism and church planting on the one hand, and ministering to human material, social, and psychological needs on the other. This dichotomy was not an issue in traditional, pre-modern societies where social institutions overlapped and reinforced one another. In pre-modern societies, “Religion” was

not a compartment of life that was separated out from what happened in the family, at work, and in seasonal festivals that celebrated the important events in the life of both the individual and the community. There were no specialized institutions such as schools to provide education for the young, hospitals to care for the ill, nor senior citizen facilities to provide support for the elderly. In premodern Japan, for example, the multi-generational household (*ie*), the village (*mura*), and in some areas of the country the extended kinship group known as the *douzoku* shared in providing guidance and support through all of the stages and exigencies of life. Shinto and Buddhist rites and festivals were woven into the fabric of the everyday life of the individual, the household and the community. “Religion” was not a compartment of life that existed apart from the ordinary practices of everyday life.

“Modernity” brought with it new ways of organizing social relationships. The various components of human experience were separated into specialized institutions: schools, factories, hospitals, government agencies, sports organizations, scientific research centers, stores and supermarkets, etc., and, of course, families and churches were impacted by that new structure of society. Families became smaller and more isolated from other social institutions, and “religion,” too, became disconnected from other institutions, beginning with the separation of church and state to which our Anabaptist forbears contributed, and then extending to the lessening of religious influences on other institutions such as education, business, the sciences, and family relationships. Sociologists call the process of reducing the influence of religion over the other institutions of society “secularization.” Separating verbal proclamation of the gospel in evangelization and mission from social ministries is also part of the process of compartmentalization of the human experience.

This Greek dualistic view of things was alien to the more holistic Hebraic worldview. The Jews did not make a distinction between the spiritual and the material, so, of course, they did not value one more highly than the other. Following the *Torah* (law) in everyday life was *both* spiritual and material. Loving God and loving ones neighbor as one loves one’s self made no distinction between words and deeds. The five Mosaic commandments that spoke to relationships with God were side by side with another five that dealt with social relationships. *Shalom* (peace, harmony, wholeness) was an ideal that was

inclusive of every kind of relationship. The type of peace within one's self and with God that Billy Graham preached about was important, but *shalom* also meant much more than just that. It meant harmonious relationships within the family, the community, the nation, the strangers in the land, and, even healthy relationships with the natural, material world around us.

The dichotomy between words and deeds was not so clear on a mission compound in Africa, China, or India where the church and the institutions that were designed to meet human needs, including education, health care, and economic development stood side-by-side, were led by the same people, and ministered in a holistic way to the various human needs of the community.

The Greek dualistic way of thinking shows up in how Christians understand the nature of "salvation." Evangelicals, including the MBs, have typically made a distinction between an initial experience of spiritual salvation through accepting the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and a subsequent step of following Jesus as Lord in the Christian's everyday life. The experience of "salvation" took primacy, both chronologically and theologically, over "sanctification," or learning to follow the teachings and example of Jesus. The missionary's primary responsibility, in this way of thinking, was to preach the Gospel of spiritual salvation. The second step of teaching new believers what this meant in their social and cultural context could be left to national pastors, who had received their theological and pastoral education from the missionaries. One implication of this "Salvationist" approach was that teaching about difficult matters such as peace-making and non-resistance was not included as part of the Gospel message. The result was what German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "Cheap Grace," an understanding of Christianity that left out "the cost of discipleship."

#### "Social Gospel" versus "Soul-winning"

The bifurcation in Christianity between evangelism/mission and social ministries was exacerbated by the rise of the "social gospel" as it was advocated by "liberals" and "modernists" on the one hand, and the conservative reaction against this movement that was spearheaded by fundamentalists and evangelicals on the other. Preaching the gospel and meeting human material, social and psychological needs were treated as polar opposites by many members of the

two parties, beginning in the years just before and after the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910). The rise of the fundamentalist movement had become a major force by the 1920s and conflicts between “social gospel liberals” and “Bible-believing, soul-winning fundamentalists” continue to the present. One of the goals of the neo-evangelical movement that began in the 1950s (e.g. Fuller Seminary and the movement that grew out of the Lausanne Missionary Conference in 1974 and subsequent follow-up conferences) was to stop viewing proclamation of the Gospel and engaging in social ministries as incompatible and to recognize, rather, that proclamation of the good news of the Gospel and working towards social justice and meeting human needs are two sides of the same coin. Some Mennonite church leaders tried to avoid taking sides in the modernist-fundamentalist controversies, hoping to encourage reconciliation and cooperation, but MBs, for the most part, sided with the conservatives.

One way to reduce the level of conflict between proclamation in evangelism and church planting and efforts to alleviate human suffering and working toward greater social justice is to divide the two into separate agencies, each with its own sphere of responsibility, budget, and staff. I will turn, next, to the story of how the Mennonite Brethren in North America have dealt with these divisive issues. The MBs have historically stated that preaching the gospel and planting churches takes precedence over almost everything else. But they have also always included ministries to human needs as part of the mandate of what it means to be Christian, and they have utilized a variety of institutions in their attempt to fulfill this mandate. I will begin with the Mennonite Central Committee, since MB mission work in Japan actually began with the relief work of the MCC.

In November, 1950, the year the first MB missionaries arrived in Japan, the Peace Section of the MCC convened a study conference during which MB mission administrator, A. E. Janzen presented a paper, “Non-resistance and Missions” in which he stated that:

The missionary found so many elementary things that needed to be taught to the young Christians as a minimum doctrine that the tenet of non-resistance as we think of it in the homeland could hardly receive special attention. The average ‘heathen Christian’ has only a very faint or no understanding of its full scope. (cited in Ramseyer, ed. 1979, p. 121)

In MB mission thinking of that era, peace might be important, but it is not an essential part of the Gospel. It was something that could be dealt with later, after a firm foundation of more fundamental convictions had been formed. An alternative perspective may be found in a statement adopted by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission secretaries in September, 1959.

We consider the message of peace a significant and integral part of the evangelical faith. We share very deeply the conviction that our peace testimony must be clear in today's world, particularly in light of the threat of militarism and the surge of nationalism.

A peace witness in a given country becomes the interest and concern of the Mennonite missions and churches in that country in order to effectively integrate the message of peace with the total message of the church and to assure this witness a solid evangelical foundation and expression. The establishment and operation of a peace witness therefore should primarily be the responsibility of the respective Mennonite mission boards and churches. (ibid, p. 128)

As we shall see, it was not until many years later that MB mission thinking moved toward the idea that peace is, in fact, a central, not a peripheral part of the Christian Gospel (see Hiedebrecht below) and that mission work must minister to human need in a holistic way. The “spiritual salvation” of individuals is not enough.

#### Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is the oldest and largest of a host of inter-Mennonite agencies, each of which provides some type of specialized function, most of which might be described as “service ministries.” Paul Toews reported (in *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*, p. 268) that during the years 1941 – 1974, the Mennonites in North America created 69 inter-Mennonite agencies. To list just a few: Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) assists in economic development in many countries around the world; Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) provides emergency relief in the immediate aftermath of a disaster; Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) (now called Everence) provides various types of insurance services; Mennonite Mental Health (MMH) helps support a chain of mental health facilities across the U.S. MB historian John A. Toews was of

the opinion that all inter-Mennonite organizations were inspired by and followed the model of the Mennonite Central Committee, so I will review the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Central Committee, not only because of the importance that the MCC has had in the Mennonite world for nearly a century, but also because the MB mission in Japan began as a cooperative venture between the MB Board of Foreign Missions and the MCC.

The Mennonite Central Committee had its beginnings in 1920 when several of the larger Mennonite denominations agreed to cooperate in bringing material relief to the Mennonites in Russia who were suffering under the brutal policies of Joseph Stalin. Many had lost their land, some had been forcibly “collectivized,” and others had escaped and were seeking refuge in Europe and in North and South America. The needs were far too great for any one small denomination to deal with, so cooperation seemed to be imperative. To provide just one fact that is indicative of the massive material needs of the Mennonite people in Russia in the early 1920s: By May, 1922, the MCC was serving food to 25,000 people each day in the Mennonite villages. MCC also worked to assist the many Mennonites who sought to emigrate from Russia. Some 18,000 left the Soviet Union during the years 1923-1927. Perhaps 25% of these emigres were Mennonite Brethren. They were assisted by the inter-Mennonite Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization that cooperated with the MCC in helping to finance and assist in the process of relocating these massive numbers of refugees.

Providing relief for suffering Mennonites in Russia was the first but not the only activity provided by the MCC. Much more information about the MCC is readily available online, but the current mission of MCC is to “share God’s love and compassion for all through relief, development, and peace.” There are currently MCC offices in 60 countries around the world. MCC activities include relief, food, water, health, education, migration, peace, and restorative justice, all done “In the Name of Christ.”

Of course there are substantial theological differences within and between the various Mennonite denominations, so any cooperation, including support for the MCC, is always complicated and difficult. One of the challenges is to resolve the tension between verbal proclamation of the Gospel and simply providing material aid. Providing food, clothing, and shelter without giving verbal testimony to the

Jesus who inspires the good deeds seems to be too much like the “social gospel,” but, on the other hand, requiring people who are starving, naked, and homeless to first listen to a Gospel message before receiving the assistance they need seems to be both insensitive and counter-productive. As I will report later, the correspondence of Henry G. Thielman, the MB founder and director of the MCC Center in Osaka, indicates that these tensions were present within the MCC unit that gave birth to MB mission work in Japan in 1950.

There have always been members in all of the Mennonite denominations who have had reservations about how the MCC goes about its work. MB ambivalences were made clear in a statement presented by the Board of Reference and Council to the MB General Conference in 1954. The statement expressed concern that the MCC was developing new programs other than providing relief, which was its original mandate, and asks that MB leadership clarify its relationship to these new programs. Similar expressions of concern, especially about the advocacy activities of the Peace Section of the MCC, continue to the present. One reason that MB support for MCC was strong during the early decades was that the long-time (1920-1953) chair of the MCC Board was Peter C. Hiebert, a U.S. MB educator and church leader. During many of these years (1924-1957), P. C. Hiebert was also chair of the MB Board of General Welfare, which I will introduce in the next section.

### World War II, Civilian Public Service (CPS) and “Peace Witness”

Mennonites of all varieties have struggled to understand and follow the “peace” component of their spiritual heritage. For some, the way of peace meant separation and withdrawal from all political participation, and “non-resistance” as the appropriate response to any form of violence. For others, “peace witness” meant active engagement in support of movements toward greater justice for the poor and the marginal in the societies around us. That sometimes meant participation in movements to abolish racism, advocacy on behalf of native-Americans, immigrants and other marginalized communities, and the development of alternative programs for people who had broken the law.

During World War II, the MCC played an important role in supporting the programs that were developed for conscientious objectors who refused to participate in the military. The various denominations in the “Peace Church”



tradition (e.g. Brethren in Christ, Church of the Brethren, Friends (Quakers), and Mennonites) were eager to encourage the U.S. Government to recognize alternatives to military service for conscientious objectors because their members had suffered persecution, including physical violence and death, when they had been inducted into the military during World War I. Mennonites from Russia were familiar with government-approved alternative service programs because the Mennonites had received permission from the Russian government to operate forestry camps for some of their members who refused induction into the military. Other Russian Mennonite men were willing to enter the military but only as non-combatants who served in the medical or transportation corps. And, of course, some were willing to accept induction into regular military service.

The leaders of the Mennonite and other Peace Church denominations were able to negotiate with the U.S. Government arrangements for alternative service through a program known as Civilian Public Service (CPS). Men who chose alternative service received the classification of “1-W” by the Selective Service administration of the U.S. government. In 1941 the MCC was assigned responsibility for administering the CPS program and this became one of the largest and most expensive programs ever conducted by Mennonite churches. CPS workers served in programs that had been approved by the U.S. Government as “necessary” to the war effort. Workers lived together in military-like “camps” where they served in a variety of activities that included work in forests (including “smoke-jumper” fire fighters) and in hospitals for the mentally ill. By the time the CPS program ended in 1947, approximately 12,000 men (38% of whom were Mennonite) had served in the camps. All expenses for the CPS program were paid by the participating churches.

Not all Mennonite men responded to the military draft by entering “alternative service” under the CPS program. As had been the case in Russia, some chose to accept induction into the military but only into “non-combatant” positions that did not involve the use of weapons. Men who chose this option were classified in the U.S. Selective Service system as “1-A-O.” Most 1-A-Os served in the medical corps. And, in spite of repeated declarations by most of the Mennonite denominations that loving both neighbors and enemies means that followers of Christ do not go to war, some members of all of the major Mennonite

denominations did choose to enter the U.S military as regular combatants, classified by the Selective Service as “1-A.”

The following table summarizes data reported by J. A. Toews on the percent of men who were conscripted into service during the years 1941-1947 who chose the several available options, by Mennonite denomination. Note that MB men were nearly evenly divided between the three options while more than a majority (58%) of GC men entered the military as combatants (I-A) while a majority (60%) of MC men chose alternative service (I-W). (p. 350-351)

	I-W	I-A-O	I-A
GC	27	16	58
MB	36	32	32
MC	60	11	30

Over a period of many decades MB leadership repeatedly expressed concern about the lack of adherence to the official MB commitment to non-participation as combatants in the military. For example, in 1951 the North American MB General Conference adopted (with only two dissenting votes) a resolution declaring that an MB church member who had served as a combatant in the military should be admonished, and if the member refused to repent, his membership should be revoked. In spite of this resolution, MB men continued to serve in combatant positions in the military without consequent discipline, raising questions about the integrity of Conference actions. Some greater degree of consistency between official proclamation and actual behavior was finally achieved in 2014 when the U.S. Conference of MB Churches changed Article 13 in the USMB Confession of Faith so that combatant military service is no longer prohibited. Disagreements about the meaning and implications of the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment to “peace” continue.

There were several unanticipated positive outcomes from the CPS experience. I will mention only three. First, men from the various peace-oriented denominations from across the country lived and worked together closely over an extended period of time, so they learned to know one another very well. Furthermore, denominational leaders were eager to provide education and pastoral support for their men in their camps, so CPS participants learned much

more about the history and theology of the peace churches than they would have without this experience. Many “graduates” of the CPS programs went on to provide informed and committed leadership in their denominations.

Second, CPS men who worked in institutions for the mentally ill were appalled at the treatment the patients received. The patients were isolated and ignored at best and many were physically abused. When CPS workers treated their patients with tenderness and respect, they found that there were many positive results, so after the war ended, the MCC took the initiative in establishing a chain of Mennonite-sponsored mental hospitals across the U.S. The coordinating organization, Mennonite Mental Health Services (MMH), became a national leader in innovative approaches to caring for the mentally ill.

And, finally, one indication of the widespread support that MCC enjoys in Mennonite communities across North America is the series of “MCC Sales and Auctions for Relief” that have been held since the 1950s in areas where there are concentrated populations of Mennonite people. MCC Sales feature a variety of ethnic foods, including traditional Dutch, Swiss, German, and Russian Mennonite foods, but also the many kinds of cuisine from around the world that are available in most American and Canadian towns and cities. Handmade quilts, antique cars and farm equipment, used furniture and other household items are sold at auction, sometimes for extravagant prices, since the funds represent a charitable contribution to ministries to human need “in the name of Christ.” Some of the Sales attract huge crowds and raise very large sums of money. An MCC Sale in Goshen, Indiana, for example, attracts about 15,000 people and raises around \$400,000 each year. The MCC Sale in Central Kansas raised \$560,000 in 2016. A single MCC Sale in Pennsylvania has contributed a total of \$12 million to MCC since their first Sale in 1957. The Sales draw together people from a great variety of Mennonite communities, from “liberal” Mennonite university students and professors to “plain” Mennonites whose men wear long beards and hook-and-eye shirts and the women wear long dresses, head coverings, and no make-up or jewelry. MCC Sales are probably the closest thing Mennonites have to a “folk festival.”

## Merger of the MB Board of General Welfare and the Board of Foreign Missions into the Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS)

In 1924 the MB General Conference created a new Board of General Welfare. This new Board was responsible for leadership and coordination of the social ministries about which MBs had been concerned since the earliest days of their history. The Board of Welfare was responsible for providing leadership in areas such as providing relief, assisting European Mennonite refugees in relocating to new areas, and matters related to peace, including negotiating with the government concerning exemptions for conscientious objectors to military service. Coordinating relationships between the MBs and the MCC was part of the assignment of this new Board. The much older MB Board of Foreign Missions was responsible for evangelism, church planting, and leadership development in foreign lands, though “alleviating human suffering” was also always included in the list of responsibilities of the Board of Foreign Missions.

Because the existence of these two Boards implied a bifurcation between word (evangelism and foreign missions) and deed (peace and relief efforts), and there was sometimes overlap and duplication in their ministries, some way of articulating the relationship between word and deed was desired. For many years the position of the Mission Board was repeatedly made clear in their reports to the MB General Conference: proclamation of the Gospel takes priority over doing deeds of mercy. In fact, the Mission Board stated that meeting social and material needs was always to be done with the goal of evangelization in mind. The Board operated schools and hospitals as means of bringing people to salvation and into church membership. Providing education and medical care were not ends in themselves. Reports from the Mission Board to the General Conference consistently focused on preaching, teaching, planting churches, organizing local churches into conferences, and providing leadership training. Social ministries received little attention in these reports and only 5-6% of Mission expenditures were designated for “social ministries.”

There were continuing ambivalences about this organizational and theological separation of word and deed, however, so in 1966 the MB General Conference, meeting in Corn, Oklahoma, agreed to merge the two Boards into a single Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS). In their statement to the General Conference

explaining their rationale for recommending the merger, the Board of Reference and Counsel (BORAC) continued to use the language of “prioritization.” BORAC “Principle” number one was that “priority” should continue to be given to the spiritual needs and the alienation from God that characterized the human condition. Preaching and teaching should continue to be the first concern of the new Board. The second “Principle” was that the merger reflects the MB conviction that “proclamation and welfare ministries ought to be integrated since our Lord and the early Church were concerned with such a total ministry.” (*Yearbook*, 1966, p. 23) So “integration” of word and deed into a “holistic” ministry was an important, though secondary, goal. However, the tone of long-time MB foreign mission leader and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. G. W. Peters, was quite different from BORAC talk about integration and holistic ministry. His report to the Conference on behalf of the mission board included the following:

Confrontation evangelism must once again become the heartthrob of our mission program while the care of institutions must become the responsibility of the national conferences. Thus to raise up, train and send forth evangelists and missionaries with the passion of Christ for the salvation of souls burning in their hearts and who know how to teach and to preach the Gospel must become the burden of our mission thrust. (*Yearbook*, 1966, p. 61)

As MBMS moved toward greater degrees of internationalization, in 1998 the word “International” was added to the name so that MBMS became the Board of Missions and Services International (MBMSI) and the process of internationalization advanced further with the fuller development of ICOMB. I will say more in the next section about other MB efforts to bring together ministries of proclamation and social welfare. Meanwhile, many MBs continued their support for the extensive ministries of MCC in meeting human needs around the globe “In the Name of Christ.”

## THEOLOGIES OF MISSION

### MB Theologies of Mission

Dr. Doug Heidebrecht, MB theologian and former director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada has recently

provided us with an interpretation of “Mennonite Brethren and the Gospel: A Theology of Mission on the Way” (*Direction*, Fall, 2013).

Heidebrecht suggested that a distinctive MB theology of mission developed through the “merger,” or “weaving together” of four theological positions: Salvationist, Kingdom of God, Trinitarian, and Holistic. He traced some of the ways in which each of these four theologies emerged at various points in the history of MB missions. He made his case by quoting extensively from MB documents and from biblical texts.

### 1. Salvationist Theology.

Salvationist theology begins with the Great Commission. In 1947 the MB Board of Foreign Missions published their first systematic statement of *Guiding Principles and Field Policies*. According to Heidebrecht,

The Board grounded the ‘aim and purpose’ of mission in the Great Commission, which was exemplified in the book of Acts and supported by principles from the Epistles. The work of mission followed the pattern of presenting ‘the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone.’... The Board did not shy away from unequivocally emphasizing evangelism as the ‘underlying basis of all foreign mission activity.’... The next two editions (1961 and 1963) of the Board’s *Guiding Principles* continued to reflect the centrality of the Great Commission for a Mennonite Brethren understanding of mission. The ‘central objective of the missionary program’ was explicitly identified as the ‘planting of local churches as agents of evangelism’ where a life of discipleship constituted ‘the basic testimony and strength of an evangelistic church.’

The ‘proclamation of the Gospel’ continued to be defined by the Great Commission, which involved ‘preaching Jesus Christ’ and ‘teaching His disciples to do the things He has commanded,’ thereby prioritizing humanity’s spiritual needs—alienation from God and redemption through Jesus Christ. (209-210)

It is quite clear that this “Salvationist” theology of mission provided the basis for almost all MB mission work in Japan.

### 2. Kingdom Theology

In a Board of Reference and Council study conference in 1971,

Victor Adrian, challenging the long-standing MB prioritization of proclamation, called for the 'inseparability of proclamation and social action' based on Jesus' 'concern for the total welfare of man' in his ministry and the 'Gospel of the kingdom' that reflected the 'wholeness of Christ's concern.' In 1972 the General Conference adopted a resolution that affirmed that Christ's call included 'both proclamation (evangelism) and social action (alleviating human suffering and mercy in the world)' because they were regarded as 'inseparable tasks.' (210)

Nevertheless, BOMAS continued to declare that church-planting evangelism would remain as their top priority and the 1975 revision of the MB Confession of Faith also stated that "We believe that the command to make disciples of all nations (Great Commission) is the primary task of the church." (211)

In 1977 BOMAS issued a new version of their *Mission Principles and Policies*. The new direction that was outlined in the document built on a wider theological foundation than simply the traditional reading of the Great Commission.

The ultimate goal of missions was not defined as evangelism, conversion, or even church planting, but rather 'to glorify God and proclaim His kingdom on earth.' Within this framework, evangelism was important as the means of entry into the kingdom; churches became the avenue for proclaiming the good news; and concern for injustice, poverty and suffering demonstrated God's love for people in need. (The incarnation of Jesus became) the model for communicating the gospel. (211)

The church was to be a global family in which the priesthood of all believers provided the basis for equal relationships that transcend "the ethnocentrism of race, culture, and nationalism." The document affirms that God provides the church with gifts and

calls for leaders in his kingdom who do not follow the world's example, which 'stresses authority and manipulation.' The primary tasks emerging from these theological positions include the building of churches that 'are a glory to God and a witness to His kingdom.' (211)

It is clear that the establishment of a Christian community was very important in what the early MB missionaries in Japan actually did, but I do not think Kingdom theology was made explicit in their rationale for their work. “Community,” it seems to me, was a means to the end of evangelistic expansion rather than an end in itself. The primary purpose of the church was “salvationist” evangelism in obedience to the “Great Commission.”

### 3. Trinitarian Theology

In line with other recent missiological thought (e.g. Scott Sunquist), during the 1980s MB mission leadership grounded their thinking about mission in the Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God. This Trinitarian approach was explicitly linked to the revised 1975 MB Confession of Faith, which identified the active involvement of all three persons of the Trinity in mission.

Mission is ‘first and foremost the task of God, who takes initiative because of his love for humanity to send his Son to save and to serve. The mandate of Christ, also motivated by his love for humanity, constitutes the core of the gospel for humanity’s total need,’ expressed in the narrative of his incarnation, life on earth, death on the cross, resurrection, and second coming. Christ’s incarnation within ‘culture-bound humankind’ provides a model for the mission of the church as articulated in the Great Commission. The ministry of the Holy Spirit convicts humans of sin, empowers the church in witness, and leads people back to God. This Trinitarian mission creates missionary churches, which are witnesses to God’s kingdom and are his *‘instruments of reconciliation, peace, and justice.’ This is the first time that MB theology of mission linked mission with peace* (emphasis mine) again reflecting dependence upon the Confession of Faith, which declared that it is the church’s evangelistic responsibility to present Christ, the Prince of Peace, as the answer to human need, enmity, and violence. (212)

Beginning mission theology with the Trinitarian formula opened the door for inclusion of peace and reconciliation as part of the Christian message, but a “peace emphasis” did not find a central place in the teachings of the MB missionaries in Japan. “Peace” was one of three themes in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the JMBC in 2000, but, as Fujino-sensei



observed, peace was not taught by the MB missionaries and remained “mostly theoretical.” (Wiens, ed., p. 208)

#### 4. Holistic Theology

The struggle to develop an MB theology of mission that articulates an appropriate relationship between proclamation of the gospel and doing works of human kindness continued.

For the first time the Confession of Faith (1999 edition) brought together the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as the biblical basis for mission and as a means for integrating ‘telling the good news’ and ‘doing acts of compassion.’ Since Christ ‘gives meaning to the gospel both in words and by example,’ the church’s ‘integrated witness of deeds and words’ must include the following: the witness of commitment as a transformed community, the witness of love through practical expressions, the witness of community before a watching world, the witness of peace and justice, and the witness of words regarding the good news of Christ... ‘The good news of God’s reconciling love is holistic, encompassing spiritual, social, relational, and physical aspects of human experience’... Since ‘God in Christ reconciles people to Himself and to one another,’ believers seek to be agents of reconciliation by demonstrating Christ’s love through their care for the poor, alleviation of suffering, promotion of justice, peace-making, and resistance of exploitation of the earth and people. (214)

Beginning with *both* Jesus’ “Great Commandment” to love God and our neighbors as ourselves *and* his “Great Commission” provides a basis for a holistic combination of words of proclamation and deeds of compassion.

Shortly after the final dissolution of the MB General Conference in 2002, the name of the Board of Missions and Services International (BOMASI) was changed to simply Mennonite Brethren Mission (MBM) to signal that the Board no longer makes a distinction between “Missions” and “Services” but brings them together under the term “Mission.”

The newly re-named MBM developed a “vision” for carrying out their new understanding of their mission: “MB Mission has a vision to see churches planted among the least reached people groups (Great Commission) where the church has

a holistic witness bringing spiritual, emotional, social and physical transformation to lives, families and communities (Great Commandment).” (214-215) Japanese MBs who serve under the organizational umbrella of MBM are part of the new strategy that includes sending international teams to “unreached people-groups” to serve together over a long period of time as representatives and witnesses to the saving grace of God in Jesus. Describing and evaluating this new strategy, including its “fit” with a “holistic theology of mission” and its long-term effectiveness lie beyond the scope of this paper.

### Heidebrecht’s Reflections

Heidebrecht concludes that these various streams of mission theology have “merged together” to form a “unique” MB theology of mission. But he also recognizes that MB interpretations of mission represent a “response” to missiological thinking in the larger Christian world, and he encourages further reflection about a series of concerns. I will briefly summarize only two of Heidebrecht’s points.

First, Heidebrecht expressed concerns about the inadequate ecclesiology of the MBs.

While MBs have consistently defined mission ecclesologically—that is, the church is both the means and the goal of mission—they have also struggled, particularly in North America, with articulating a shared theology of the church that can provide a unifying and guiding vision for local congregational life and practice. This lack of a “thoroughgoing ecclesiology,” which is also characteristic of Evangelicalism as a whole, highlights the need for greater clarity regarding the nature of the church and how that is expressed through its practices within various cultural contexts. This is particularly significant, first, because the vision to plant churches still begs the question regarding what kind of churches are actually being planted—what do we mean when we say we are planting MB churches? Second, our understanding of the church’s ministries and leadership, which facilitate the continuing mission of the church, emerges from our theology of the nature of the church, not the other way around. Furthermore, greater clarity regarding the relationship between the church

and the kingdom of God will contribute to a better understanding of how the church proclaims and demonstrates God's reign. (218)

Second, concerning peace theology: "Despite a historic emphasis on the significance of a peace theology, Mennonite Brethren have rarely acknowledged that 'peace and reconciliation' are at the heart of the Christian gospel." Peace is not a "secondary matter" related to the alleviation of suffering and working toward justice. "Reconciliation with God and between people are both essential aspects of the gospel message." MB mission theology has not given peace-making its rightful place. (218)

I personally wonder how the new MB "Holistic theology" is actually being implemented and I wonder how it is being evaluated and by whom the evaluations are being done. As I will report below, in 1997 Dr. Robert Lee wondered whether the new MB mission policies were just missiological "jargon" or if they would actually be implemented in new practices. I trust that someone is providing answers to questions like these.

#### The Great Commission Reconsidered

As Heidebrecht and many others have pointed out, obedience to Jesus' final mandate to his disciples to "go into all the world" had a powerful influence in the motivation of many missionaries during the era of the modern missionary movement. It seemed simple enough: People both near and far were living in spiritual darkness without the Gospel. Jesus commanded his disciples to "go," so, in obedience to his final instructions, some Christians needed to travel far away to "the ends of the earth" to spread the good news to people who had never heard while those who remained at home should witness to neighbors and strangers. Those who remained at home should also provide the needed prayer and financial support for those who were specially called to obey Jesus' command to go. But it turns out that a closer reading of this text indicates that things are not quite this simple.

Because the Great Commission has been so important in the missionary movement for many years, I will provide a brief summary of an alternative analysis offered by German Mennonite mission theologian, Bernhard Ott. Ott is a graduate of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California and he was a member of the faculty of the Bienenberg Theological Seminary in

Switzerland, a joint venture sponsored by the U.S. Mennonite Church (now the MCUSA) and French, German, and Swiss Mennonite communities. His book, *God's Shalom Project* was recently translated from German into English by MB seminary professor, Tim Geddert, and into Japanese by JMBC pastor and seminary administrator, Dr. Hironori Minamino.

First, Ott said, contrary to the impression that is conveyed in many English translations of Matthew 28:19-20, the Greek text does not list four imperative verbs in a sequence: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. In the Greek text there is only one imperative, and that is to "make disciples." The other verbs are participles that modify "make disciples," so "as you go" would be a better translation than "go" as a command. Going, teaching and baptizing modify or support the process of making disciples.

Second, The Great Commission represents the culmination of Matthew's gospel, but it is important to understand how this final passage fits into the gospel as a whole. Matthew 28:16 provides a clue that would have been understood by the late first century Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity who were the author's primary audience. Jesus' Great Commission was preceded by another command, and that is to go to a mountain. This would have reminded the readers of other mountains that were important in the structure of Matthew's narrative, and even of the account in the Old Testament of Moses' ascent on Mount Sinai where he encountered YHWH and received the Decalogue, the first declaration of God's *Torah* (law) for the people of Israel. Mountains were very important symbols throughout the biblical texts.

The first mountain mentioned in Matthew's gospel is the mountain of Jesus' temptation. His temptation followed his inauguration as the Messianic Son of God, so each of the temptations had to do with the means that Jesus would use to fulfill his mission. Would he rely entirely on the way of the Suffering Servant and the Prince of Peace, or would he utilize the incentives and the powers of this world as means to fulfill his calling? The disciples would have understood that what tempted Jesus would tempt them, also. Would they use economic, social, or military power to accomplish their assigned task of making disciples? Would they resort to material means rather than simply teaching and baptizing as they went?

All too often the church, unlike Jesus, has failed this test, using overt force or covert manipulation to induce people to convert to Christianity.

The second mountain that appears in Matthew's narrative is the location where Jesus delivered his "Sermon on the Mount." The readers and hearers would have recognized that there is a connection between the Great Commission and the Sermon on the Mount because the phrase "heaven and earth" is reminiscent of the similar phrase, "on earth as it is in heaven" in the Lord's Prayer that falls in the middle of Jesus' Sermon. These are the only two uses of this formula in the New Testament. So the disciples would have understood that the Sermon on the Mount provides the essential content of the teaching that is part of making disciples. Furthermore, the early audiences would have understood that just as the Decalogue received by Moses on Mount Sinai was a kind of charter for the original covenant people, the Sermon on the Mount outlined the way of life that should characterize the new covenant community of followers of Jesus. And, finally, they would have understood that prayer is at the center of this new way of life for a new community, just as the Lord's Prayer was central in the Sermon on the Mount.

The third mountain mentioned in Matthew's gospel is the "Mount of Transfiguration" that is, again, reminiscent of Mt. Sinai where Moses encountered YHWH in a special and direct way. One response might have been to do as the disciples suggested, and that is to build shrines to commemorate the dramatic event they had just witnessed, but as Ott comments, YHWH was not a "mountain god" and neither was Jesus. The cloud that enshrouded Mount Sinai moved away so that the people of Israel could continue on their journey, and Jesus led his disciples back down from the mountaintop into the "real world" below where they would experience his presence with them as they continued their journeys.

The meaning of the presence of Jesus with his disciples merits a few additional comments. First, Jesus promised to be present where even two or three were gathered in his name. This might well be parallel to the Jewish rabbinic promise that the *shekinah* glory of God was present wherever two or three Jews met to discuss the implications of the *Torah* for their daily lives. So there are communal and ethical dimensions to the presence of Jesus. And, Jesus' promise to his disciples that he would be with them is sometimes translated into English as "to

the end of the earth” (as in the King James Version) but it would be better translated as “to the end of the age” (as in the Revised Standard Version). The Greek word *aion* is a chronological, not a geographic term.

I will quote just a few comments from Ott’s “Summary and Conclusion”:

The ‘teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ is an integral and substantial part of ‘making disciples.’ The Sermon on the Mount provides the core curriculum of this instruction. This means: no mission without the Sermon on the Mount! The separation of ethics (Sermon on the Mount) and mission (Great Commission) is destructive. It separates two great truths which belong together. This means that concern for the poor, engagement for righteousness and justice, loving the enemy, not resisting the evil with evil means, and promoting reconciliation and peace are indispensable ingredients of the Christian message.

This entire focus on ethics aims at the creation of kingdom communities which live as ‘cities on a mountain,’ as light of the world, as a demonstration of a new life. Thus, the purpose of mission should not be limited to the saving of individuals. The creation of kingdom communities is not a more or less optional second step but an inherent part of the Great Commission...

Matthew 28:16-20 does not provide a foundation for an evangelism-only concept of mission. On the contrary, the final verses of Matthew provide a powerful and sound foundation for an integral (holistic) understanding of mission—if interpreted in the light of the entire Gospel.

And of course: In order to get the full-orbed picture of a New Testament understanding of mission the other authors of the New Testament have to be considered as well. (80-81)

It is clear from Ott’s discussion that there is continuing disagreement within the larger global evangelical, Mennonite, and, even, the extended MB family of churches about the theology of mission. In the conclusion to his article, Ott takes issue with a recently (2005) re-edited German translation of long-time MB mission leader (and Dallas Theological Seminary professor), Dr. George W Peters’ *A Biblical Theology of Mission*, originally published in 1972. Ott summarized the

main points in Peters' treatment of the Great Commission and concludes that "While such an understanding summarizes significant aspects of the text, it is too narrow and too one-sided. History shows that it has the potential of leading to an individualized and spiritualized understanding of mission." (79) Ott continues:

Evangelization always means the entire human being including health, material needs and social circumstances. The good news is not only good news for the soul but for the entire person. Healing, feeding the hungry and confronting destructive powers are an integral part of Jesus' ministry and cannot be deemed "philanthropic deeds" of some sort of second order (as in G. W. Peters' theology). (80)

#### DR. JACOB A. LOEWEN: A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

An example of an MB missionary and missiologist who personifies some of the personal and theological transitions that MB missions have gone through is that of Dr. Jacob A. Loewen (1922-2006). Dr. Loewen was born in Russia and migrated to Canada with his family as a child. He became a well-known linguistic anthropologist and missiologist. Dr. Loewen and his wife, Anne, first served for ten years (1947-1957) as MB missionaries among tribal people in Panama and Colombia in South America and then he taught at the MB Tabor College in Kansas from 1958 to 1964. For twenty years (1964-1984) he served as a translation consultant with the American and United Bible Societies, helping to solve problems in the translation of biblical texts into new languages. He served for many years in both South America and in Africa. He was a frequent contributor to journals related to missions, linguistics and anthropology such as *Practical Anthropology*, *Missiology* and *The Bible Translator*, as well as to Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren related journals such as *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, *Direction*, *Christian Leader*, and *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. In his autobiography, *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey* (2000), Dr. Loewen recounted some of the transitions he experienced in the course of his long career in missions.

At the beginning I was a dyed-in-the-wool nondenominational soul-winner. As I began to see the benefits of denominational missions, I became a church transplanter. Eventually, however, I also saw how artificial such transplanting often is and that what is really needed is an indigenous church that lives and develops its own cultural milieu. Thus I realized that the only viable task for a missionary is that of a catalyst. But even this

probably isn't the end. Missions is an ongoing process and there are still many lessons to be learned. (179)

A missionary as “catalyst” facilitates dialog and exchange within the Christian community and between Christians and persons of other faiths. Since no individual person and no single community has an exclusive claim on the whole truth, and since God is present and at work in every time and place, including tribal cultures around the world as well as in Buddhist and other religious communities, one goal of Christian mission is to facilitate mutual sharing so we can all learn to see more clearly who God is and how God is at work within every culture.

Among the many personal anecdotes that he recounted in his autobiography was an encounter with a Hindu priest in Southern India. When Dr. Loewen and his wife were refused entrance into a large Hindu temple because they were not wearing the proper clothing, a monk “in a dirty yellow robe” approached them to say that what had happened was wrong. “God does not exclude anybody from his house. God is one and he wants to receive all people regardless of who or what they are.” After saying this, the Hindu priest invited them to enter a small, one-room side chapel that was attached to the great temple.

The priest then asked us to kneel in prayer. My wife and I knelt down with him. He asked us to pray, and we did. Then he prayed. When we got up and he shook our hands, I must honestly say I felt I had met a kindred soul. I had met one of my fellow members of God's family. (161)

In one of the closing paragraphs near the end of his final chapter, “My Pilgrimage in Mission: A Summary,” linguist Dr. Loewen reflected as follows:

By the time I retired in 1984, I had probably worked with several hundred different languages. In the course of this experience, I learned that there is truly only *one* God in this entire world but that this one God is known by hundreds—yes, thousands—of different names in different languages. I became convinced that this God was at work in the various cultures of the world long before the first missionary came and would still be working after the last missionary left. I further learned that these languages and cultures had something to teach me about God and his Word. (300-301)

Of course we must recognize that not all missionaries experienced transitions anything like this. Neither does this resolve the many complicated issues that are



involved in relationships between Christianity and other religions. But I think it is important to acknowledge the fact that the family of God is larger and more inclusive than many of us are inclined to think. It is easy to assume that our understandings are close to the mind of God. But many of us would do well to humbly pray with the words of the confession that Roman Catholic writer, Shusaku Endo, put into the mouth of a sixteenth century Franciscan missionary father in his novel, *The Samurai*: “I confused my own will with the will of God.” (264)

## IN SUMMARY

As a way of summarizing the place of the Mennonites in the *missio Dei*, I will conclude Part One with a long quotation from John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective* (2014). Yoder (1927-1997) was undoubtedly the most widely known and influential Anabaptist theologian of his generation. His *Theology of Mission* was published posthumously by the evangelical Inter-Varsity Press, based on transcribed lectures that Yoder gave in his course on mission at the Associated (now Anabaptist) Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in 1973 and 1976. The overview that follows comes at the end of Yoder’s discussion of “Presence” as a strategy for mission.

The Western Mennonite church comes out of a long period of quietism. In the first part of the twentieth century—longer only in the Netherlands—Mennonites were drawn into missionary activity. We are now more aware of and concerned for the world beyond our membership. We feel responsible in terms of stewardship and vocation. In these ways we have caught up with what the mainstream Protestant denominations were doing by way of world missions. We have begun to do what they were doing a few decades ago. But now, coming partly from the mainstream, is a counter-thrust saying maybe mission should not have been so organized or institutional. Maybe missionaries should not have brought so much Western machinery along. This is partly a critique from people in the younger churches. It stems partly from biblical insight about how being the church is prior to doing the mission. It may be, negatively speaking, loss of nerve or, affirmatively speaking, insight into servanthood. Questions about

missionary activism have come to us from the same Protestant mainstream from which a few generations ago we picked up missionary activism...

We still need to ask, as we consider missionary presence, whether there may be times when activism is an escape from being the church back home. One of the examples that has been argued most visibly was to ask how it could happen that a white Southern Baptist who would not want to have a black person in his church in Georgia (a state in the southern U.S.A.) in the 1930s could have a profound spiritual motivation for going to Africa to be in churches with black people. There may have been times when activism was itself an escape from the challenge to be the church at home. However, that does not mean that staying home until our churches have solved their problems, or especially staying home the way Mennonites stayed home in their quiet faithfulness, is an adequate alternative to going and serving.

(One of the meanings of presence) that is linked to Jesus' call to servanthood is Christian presence as demonstrating what is different from the world. The challenge Christians bring must include their being a body there rather than offering only a message, political center or doctrinal scheme. Presence offers critique but it is not a matter of going around denouncing evils. Rather it is presenting the alternative that Christian faith represents in that new place. (p. 335-337)

But, in spite of these and many other changes, challenges, and conflicts (the "earthen vessels") in the long story of Mennonite Brethren mission efforts, the outcome has been truly amazing. According to information posted by ICOMB, the mission programs of the small MB denomination have eventuated in the establishment of 21 national conferences spread around the globe with a total of some 450,000 persons who are in some way involved in MB churches. That total does not include the unknown number of Christians who might remain in and around the former North, South, and West China fields. We must also acknowledge that these numbers say nothing at all about the content of the faith nor the quality of the Christian life that characterize these many individuals and congregations who are associated with the global MB community.

The Japan Mennonite Brethren Conference is part of that new global MB community. We will turn next to the missionary efforts that gave birth to that new community of MB Christians in Japan.

## PART TWO: THE STORY OF MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONS IN JAPAN

### INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE PARAMETERS

In Part One of this report I used historical, missiological and theological materials to summarize the social and religious contexts that formed the background out of which Mennonite Brethren missionary work in Japan emerged. In Part Two I have described some of the developments in the history of MB missionary efforts in Japan. My focus has been on the role of MB *missionary* work in Japan. The task of telling the Japanese MB side of the story will remain for some other person to accomplish.

In two brief reviews of the history of the Japan Mennonite Brethren Conference (JMBC) (Abe Dueck, ed. and Victor Wiens, ed.), Pastor Jun'ichi Fujino pointed out that the MB churches in Japan were mostly founded and initially largely shaped by MB missionaries from North America. The missionaries planted 23 of the 29 congregations that belonged to the JMBC in 2015. Money from North America provided financial support for the missionaries and their families and assisted in financing the land and buildings of many of the JMBC congregations. The missionaries initiated most of the major programs that have been carried on by the JMBC. Among these programs are: tent evangelism and a conference evangelist; a camp site and camping programs; a radio ministry; publication of Christian education materials; pastoral training programs; a conference periodical; and the organizational structures of the JMBC itself. The missionaries also established the largely fundamentalist and dispensational theological foundation upon which most of the congregations of the JMBC were built. Of course, in all of this the missionaries were influenced by their own social, cultural and religious backgrounds.

It is time now, Pastor Fujino says, "to discern more carefully which traditions had to be changed and which should be kept." (Dueck, p. 143 and Wiens, p. 210) One of my goals in what follows is to shed some additional light on what the influences of the missionaries were and in what ways these missionary influences have helped to shape the JMBC. Of course it is up to the JMBC to determine which of the influences of the missionaries should be kept, which should be modified, and which should be left behind.

Since many years have passed since the arrival of MB missionaries in 1950, many of the younger JMBC pastors have no direct memories and very little understanding of the missionaries themselves, or the ideas, programs, and the administrative structures and policies that guided their work. To repeat the words of one of the JMBC pastors, “The mission is like a black box to us. We have no idea what was going on inside.” One of my goals in this project has been to open up that “black box,” partially, at least.

I have reviewed some, but by no means all of the massive quantities of mission records pertaining to Japan that are available in the mission archives in the Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University. The archives include minutes of meetings, correspondence, budgets, and reports of various kinds. Many of these materials are difficult to read “carbon copies” typed on thin “onion-skin” paper, or on the old blue “aerogram” airmail forms that were the least expensive way to correspond in those days. Some of the most personal and confidential materials remain closed to the public (including me) so I have no idea what is contained in those documents.

My goal has been to provide summaries of just *some* of the materials that I think are important parts of the story of MB missions in Japan. I have focused on the first 30 years or so in the history of MB mission work in Japan (1949-1980) because that is the period during which missionary influences on the JMBC were the strongest. All of the early “founding” MB missionaries had retired by 1990. I have written in detail about just a few of the many important people and events that comprise the complete story.

This means that the selections and the interpretations that follow are mine, and mine alone. No one else would have chosen to select (and omit) exactly the same materials that I have, nor would anyone else have summarized and interpreted these materials in the same way that I have. I am sure that I have written too much about some topics and not enough about others. I am also very much aware that my perceptions and evaluations have been shaped by my own personal experiences, but I have attempted, insofar as possible, to rely on written materials rather than my own recollections, impressions and opinions. I have tried to open just a few windows into the “black box” of the MB mission in Japan. I have not attempted to open up the whole thing.

My personal experiences receive little direct attention in what follows, but, because my own experiences have necessarily shaped the thoughts and feelings that are implicit in this report, I have added Appendix I for anyone who is interested in a review of some of my own history of relationships with the MB mission in Japan, and some of the other experiences in Japan and elsewhere that have shaped my thoughts and my actions through most of my adult life.

Appendix II presents the photos that the JMBC selected to append to their translation of this report.

## 7. IN THE NAME OF CHRIST: THE HOLISTIC MINISTRIES OF HENRY G. AND LYDIA THIELMAN AND THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN OSAKA

### MENNONITE BRETHERN/MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE COOPERATION

It seems to be well known within the JMBC that the first MB workers to arrive in Japan were Canadians Henry G. and Lydia (Reimer) Thielman. They arrived in Osaka in 1949 and they were the founders and administrative leaders of The Osaka Relief Center, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), that was located in Kasugade-cho, Konohana-ku, Osaka Prefecture. It is less widely known that the Thielmans brought with them a rich background of life-experiences that served them well in meeting the many challenges that they faced in establishing a new program of social services in one of the poorest sections of Osaka, during the difficult years just following the end of WW II when much of Japan was still in a state of devastation. In Part One I provided a brief, general introduction to the work of the MCC. In what follows, I will introduce the Thielmans, the MCC “relief work” that they did in Osaka “in the name of Christ,” and the earliest beginnings of MB mission work in Japan.

The first mention of Japan that I have been able to locate in the MB mission archives was in the *Yearbook* of the 1945 (the year WW II ended) meeting of the MB General Conference. MB leader and MCC board chairman P. C. Hiebert reported that the MCC was investigating the possibility of doing relief work in Japan with the idea that the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions would follow up with “spiritual” mission work when the MCC relief work was completed. The MB Conference responded “positively” to that idea. Planning for such a joint venture began.

Three years later, MB Mission Administrator A. E. Janzen reported on a May 4, 1948 meeting of mission administrators in Chicago. He provided a summary of a presentation by Dr. David Johnson. Because Japan had lost the war, Dr. Johnson told the gathered mission administrators, the old gods had been discredited. The Japanese people were confused, discouraged, and open to the Christian gospel. General Douglas MacArthur had done a good job of organizing Japan and the General was asking that many more missionaries be sent to Japan. Communism was not much of a threat at that time, as it was in China and elsewhere. Other missions were sending missionaries but the evangelical mission boards had been slow to respond to the “open doors” in Japan. According to Dr. Johnson, about 300 new missionaries had come to Japan since the end of the war, but most of them were “liberals.” Only about 35 of these new missionaries were truly “born again,” he said.

During that same summer (1948), the Mennonite Central Committee investigated possible locations for a relief project in Japan. By the end of the summer MCC had chosen Osaka as the site for their project. MCC invited the MB mission board to recommend MB workers to serve in its relief projects so that there would be continuity between the relief work and the mission efforts to follow. The plan was that MCC would sell their property to the MB mission when the MCC had completed their work.

Later that summer, on August 29, 1948, the delegates to the MB North American General Conference, meeting in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, voted to authorize their mission board to open a new “field” in Japan. This was part of a very rapid expansion of MB missionary work into new countries during the years 1948 – 1965. Henry Thielman was invited to be the “mature minister” who was to go to Japan as an MCC relief worker with the expectation that he would continue on as an MB missionary.

The first entry in a collection of correspondence gathered in a binder by the Thielmans (“Japan: 1949 – 1952”) is a telegram from MB Mission Administrator A. E. Janzen in Hillsboro, Kansas. The telegram is dated August 20, 1948, shortly before the August 29 meeting of the MB General Conference in Mountain Lake. The telegram reads: “Would you and sister Thielman be interested to go this fall to Japan for two years relief work and organize a mission to be taken over by

Board later wire collect A E Janzen.” Mrs. Thielman reports, in her “Abbreviated Memoir” (c. 1982), that the telegram came as a “great shock.” Henry Thielman was 44 years old when this telegram arrived. He had been a successful small businessman for several years before entering the ministry and he had enjoyed being the pastor of the MB Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada for five years. He and Mrs. Thielman were in the early stages of adopting an infant daughter, Linda, to join their adopted son, Albert, who was 10 years old. Mrs. Thielman’s memoir offers many other details about their history before, during and after their three-year sojourn in Japan.

#### HENRY G. AND LYDIA THIELMAN: PERSONAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

The story of the early years of Henry Thielman’s life is typical of the story of many Mennonites who migrated from Russia to Canada in the years after the communist revolution in Russia in 1917. He was born on October 15, 1904 in the village of Neukirch in the Mennonite Molotschna Colony in South Russia. His father was a farmer and the family was poor. Henry was the fourth of 12 children. When the family was able to borrow enough money to send one of their children to Canada, Henry was selected as the one who should have this opportunity. He left Russia on November 19, 1926, when he was 22 years old. As it happened, he traveled on the same ship as Lydia Reimer, the 20 year old young woman who would later become his wife.

Lydia Reimer was born on October 8, 1906, also in the Molotschna Colony, but her family circumstances were different from Henry’s. Her father was the owner of a sizable (65 destine) farm and he was also a minister. Lydia commented about the Austrian male servant and Russian maid who worked in their home. Her father had studied the Bible in Berlin for one year and for two years he was a student in the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, Germany. In 1906 the Reimer family moved from the Molotschna Colony to another small community of Mennonites in Jelanskaya in Ufa in northern Russia where Mr. Reimer farmed and provided leadership in three churches in the area. After the Revolution in 1917, their circumstances became very difficult and they felt that their lives were in danger, so in 1921 Lydia’s family moved back to the larger Mennonite community in Molotschna where her father spent two years as pastor of the MB Church in Liege. But conditions were still very difficult. As was the case with many others in



Russia at that time, members of her family suffered from a variety of diseases, including cholera, malaria, dysentery and trachoma. She reports that their lives were saved by the “American Relief” from the “American kitchen” (MCC relief projects) that provided them with food during a severe famine in 1922 -1923. After several years of effort, the Reimer family was finally able to leave Russia on November 19, 1926.

Henry Thielman and the Reimer family were able to leave Russia, but many Mennonites remained behind. Because MANY families who left Russia received accounts very much like this from relatives who remained in Russia, I will present excerpts from a letter that the Thielmans received from Henry’s oldest brother, Abraham, reporting on a letter that he had received from their father, Gerhard Jacob Thielman (1869-1935). The letter is dated January 1, 1933. Reports like this are part of the historical memory of the many North American Mennonites whose family roots go back to the colonies in south Russia.

Even though Mrs. Thielman reported that her husband’s family was poor, the elder Thielman was branded by the communists as a “kulak” (which Mrs. Thielman translates as “rich farmer”). “Everything he owned” was confiscated, and he was sentenced to ten years in prison. The letter from Henry’s brother continues:

Today we received a letter from him. He is in the prison in Melitopol, but is to be sent to the north (Siberia). Because he cannot work on account of his weakness and age, he has been placed in a cell for invalids. He is together with 20 men (cripples, sick, old men), actually 30 men in a room which is two fathoms in length by one half fathom wide. It will be plain to you that they cannot lie down because the cell is so crowded. Day and night they have to sit or stand. Their food ration: once a day “borscht” (a soup) of the second category, which consists of clear water and a few pieces of beets. In the evening they get a plate of oatmeal (actually water and a few kernels). Until now they have received 300 grams of bread a day, but from the time of writing they were to receive only 150 grams a day.

Father writes that many (inmates of the prison) die of hunger and he is also facing this prospect. He and his fellow cellmates are already swollen from the effects of malnutrition. They are being eaten by lice while they are

still alive. His situation is terrible!!! Many, many thousands are in a similar situation. Terror sweeps the land like a hurricane.

Henry and Lydia were among the fortunate ones who were able to escape from these dire circumstances, but their fate upon their arrival in Canada was still not easy. For one thing, most Mennonites from Russia arrived with large debts to the Canadian Pacific Railroad company, something that they were not accustomed to in Russia and which many felt to be a very heavy burden. The Reimer family settled in Manitoba and Henry made his home in Ontario. At first Lydia did housework for well-to-do Canadian families and later she found work sewing in a “shirt factory.” About one year after their arrival in Canada, Lydia received the letter from Henry that she had been hoping for since their meeting on the ship that brought them to Canada. Henry asked her to marry him. They were married two years later, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on October 6, 1929.

When they could not find work in Hamilton or Windsor, Ontario, they moved to Leamington where Henry finally found work for a farmer who provided them with a small house. During the cold winters Henry worked in a tobacco factory, even though they were personally opposed to smoking. The Reimer family joined them later and the ten members of the extended family all lived together in a three-room house, not unlike many other families during those years of the “Great Depression.” The family enjoyed participating in the life of the Mennonite church in Leamington, which was a joint Mennonite Brethren-General Conference Mennonite congregation.

The Thielmans struggled over a period of years with the question of whether Henry should prepare for church ministry. They finally moved to Winkler, Manitoba where Henry was a student in the MB Bible School for one year. After their return to Leamington, Henry and a friend began a small business that consisted of purchasing groceries and selling them from the bed of a truck to farmers living in the area. From this humble beginning, the two partners rented a building in the town in which they operated what became a very successful grocery store.

But the Thielmans still carried a sense of “inner unrest” because Henry still felt a call to ministry, which he resisted because he was afraid he might be called to be a minister or a missionary. A. E. Janzen reported that the Thielmans had already

contacted the MB mission board as early as 1941 about possible missionary service in India but World War II made that impossible. Henry also felt that it would be a “contradiction” for God to first bless him with a successful business and then call him to do something else. To which long-time MB mission board member and conference leader, H. W. Lohrenz, responded, in a private conversation, that it was his observation that a person who is not successful at home will not be successful on the mission field, either. Henry finally sold his share of their grocery business in Leamington to his partner, and the Thielmans moved back to Winkler to complete the Bible School program there.

After graduation in the spring of 1943, they moved back to Ontario. Henry planned to complete his education at Tabor College, the MB school in Hillsboro, Kansas, but they could not obtain visas, so they settled in Kitchener, Ontario. In 1944 Henry was ordained to the ministry and he was then called to be the pastor of the Kitchener MB Church. He was one of the first MB pastors to receive a salary, which was \$75 per month, supplemented by produce from the farms and gardens of the church members. Lydia reports that they greatly enjoyed their five years of living and ministering in Kitchener, so it required “a lot of talking” in the MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania before the Thielmans were prepared to say “yes” to the joint invitation from the MCC and the MB Board of Foreign Missions to go to Japan to establish an MCC “relief unit.” When Canadian adoption officials agreed to permit the Thielmans to take infant Linda out of the country even though the legally required two year adoption process had not yet been completed, during the early spring of 1949 the Thielmans accepted the invitation to go to Japan.

#### GETTING STARTED IN OSAKA

After difficult farewells to their church, family, and friends, the four Thielmans boarded the freighter *Maiden Creek* in New Orleans, Louisiana, sailed across the Gulf of Mexico, through the Panama Canal, and finally to Yokohama, with a brief stop in Honolulu, Hawaii. They arrived in Yokohama on April 24, 1949 and in Kobe three days later. The trip took 31 days. In spite of efforts by the two boards, the Thielmans left the U.S. without visas to enter Japan, intending to continue on to China if they were refused entry into Japan.

Much of what follows is taken from correspondence between the Thielmans and MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania and their many family and friends in Canada and elsewhere, and from the memoir written by Mrs. Thielman.

Approximately one third of the letters the Thielmans sent are written in German, which I am, unfortunately, unable to read. The nuances are different in German, I am sure, since English was their second language, but I will briefly summarize what was accessible to me.

Fortunately, when the Thielmans stopped in Yokohama, they were met by Dr. George E Bott, director of the Church World Service organization, with documents giving them “military permission to enter Japan.” But when they arrived at the port in Kobe, there was no one present to greet them. They were finally able to meet an American military officer. Henry Thielman reported the following to J. N. Byler, his MCC administrative supervisor in Akron, Pennsylvania: “He finally gave me an address to a Catholic chaplain in Osaka. We had to stay on board the ship one more night and went to Osaka the next day with our belongings, not knowing where we would find a place to stay.” They managed to find a room in a hotel, but for one night only. After that “There was not a single room available in Osaka.” In the morning they met an American man who was the manager of a large hotel in Kyoto who reported that he had one room available where they could stay. So they travelled to Kyoto where they were able to stay in the *Rakuyo* hotel (for \$12/night). They remained in this hotel for more than six weeks, commuting to Osaka where they hoped to begin their work.

In Osaka, they happened to meet a retired Christian minister from the *Nihon Kirisuto Kyoudan* (National Christian Church) named Rev. Yoshida who helped them make contacts in their search for a suitable location on which they could build their residence, meeting place and other facilities to begin their relief work. According to Mrs. Thielman’s recollections, they met the “mayor of Osaka” who was happy to welcome them and, in support of their benevolent intentions, the “mayor” made a taxi available for them to use for four days to aid in their search for property. Through introductions made by Rev. Yoshida, they were finally able to locate a 400 tsubo (15,000 square feet) piece of vacant land that was owned by the well-known Japanese evangelist and social reformer, Toyohiko Kagawa of the “Kobe Jesus Band.” Rev. Kagawa agreed to permit the MCC to use his property free of charge, with the proviso that he would be able to construct a facility for a

children's ministry on 50 tsubo of the land at some time in the future. The property was in Konohana-ku, on a peninsula jutting out into Osaka Bay, in the southern part of the city of Osaka. The area had been severely bombed during the war because munitions factories had been located there. It was one of the poorest sections of the city. In his early reports, Mr. Thielman wrote about the many poor people and the awful condition of the people who lived in the area, but, in later months, he joined other observers in calling the area a "slum." In spite of all of this, the arrangement seemed to be ideal to both the Thielmans and the MCC administrators in Akron, Pennsylvania.

Much of the correspondence during the next period of time involves details concerning the construction of their residence and facilities. MCC had shipped three prefabricated buildings to use as a residence and in their relief work, but first the rubble from the war needed to be cleared away and someone needed to construct the buildings. All of this required obtaining the appropriate permits, agreements with building contractors, and the necessary tools and other equipment and supplies, such as windows and toilets. Window glass, Henry Thielman reported, was available only on the "black market" and since Christians, in principle, did not participate in the black market, acquisition of materials for windows was especially complicated. Matters were also complicated by the fact that there was much thievery. Since their property was located on the "outskirts" of Osaka and convenient public transportation was not available, Henry Thielman requested permission from MCC to purchase a vehicle, which, in turn made a secure garage a necessity. So the Thielmans received permission from MCC to purchase a vehicle that could also be used for hauling materials and he was authorized to construct a garage to be used to secure the vehicle and for storage of other things. A small residence was constructed as a second floor above the garage. In April, 1950, the U.S. Army released some of the prefabricated buildings that they had been using as barracks to be used by social service agencies, so Mr. Thielman arranged for the acquisition of two of those buildings and then oversaw their reconstruction on the MCC site.

This second residence above the garage was necessary because the Thielmans were not the only persons sent to Osaka to conduct MCC relief work. Miss Alice Fast, an MB woman from Blaine, Washington, and two single sisters, Ruth and Rhoda Ressler, Mennonite Church (MC or "Old" Mennonite Church) teachers

were sent to assist the Thielmans, and these women also needed residences, since other housing was not available in that area.

The Ressler sisters were more than 40 years old when they arrived in Osaka. They were the daughters of the first missionaries sent to India by the (Old) Mennonite Church. They were actually on their way to China when Mao's revolution closed that country, so they were diverted to the MCC relief unit in Osaka. After completion of their terms in Osaka with MCC, the Ressler sisters continued on in Japan as MC missionaries, serving as English teachers and assisting in church work for the next 25 years, in Kobe, Osaka, and in various MC congregations in Hokkaido.

#### PROGRAMS OF THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE RELIEF CENTER

I do not know how MCC decided with which needs to begin the "relief work" that they would offer in a large post-war Japanese "slum" community in which the residents were in need of many of the basic human needs for survival: food, clothing, and shelter, to say nothing of moral and spiritual needs such as hope for their future. "I would not want my dog to live in a place like they do here." Henry Thielman wrote in December, 1949. But, apparently, the relief program was designed to center around clothing. MCC shipped sewing machines and bundles of cloth materials that could be used to repair torn and damaged clothing for their families, and at the same time, teach women in the neighborhood a skill (sewing) that might help them earn some income.

But the programs of the Osaka Relief Center of the Mennonite Central Committee included many activities in addition to sewing. I will briefly summarize from an undated report that Mr. Thielman sent to MCC headquarters during the summer of 1951 in which he reviewed the status of their work.

1. The sewing projects were done in cooperation with an "advisory committee" that was appointed by city welfare officials. This committee identified the poorest people, who would be eligible to participate in the program. The sewing program was serving approximately 100 women each week.

2. The Thielmans, two Ressler sisters and Alice Fast were teaching 530 English students each week, in junior and senior high schools, churches, the YMCA, and factory offices. These classes provided the MCC workers with an opportunity for "indoctrination in democracy and Christianity."

3. In the approximately six months since December, 1950, 330 persons had received dental services provided by three volunteer dentists who used a small dental office set up in the MCC Center. They were “trying to improve the health of underprivileged children.”
4. The MCC women provided cooking lessons for about 35 women each month. One goal was to teach the women how to prepare more nutritious meals for their families.
5. The Center hosted about 150 children each week for meetings in which the children heard Christian stories, learned Christian songs, and received instruction in health and sanitation.
6. The MCC workers conducted Bible classes for 325 students each week, in schools, churches, the YMCA and hospitals.
7. The Center organized a 20 member choir that helped with church meetings.
8. The Center hosted a Saturday evening hymn sing with attendance around 40 persons.
9. The Center hosted a Sunday evening worship service with approximately 85 in attendance.
10. The Center offered training in the American system of sign language for approximately 90 teachers of the deaf.
11. Mr. Thielman organized a small “Boys’ Club” with about six students who gathered for instruction in the use of tools. His goal was to “keep the boys off the streets and out of mischief.”
12. The Center provided a small “Reading Room,” staffed by two high school girls, that provided a quiet place for study.
13. The Center periodically distributed clothing, food, and Christmas bundles.
14. There was playground space on the site that was used by “many.” This was greatly appreciated by children and parents, since there was no other place in the area where children could play.

But the Thielmans were involved in much more than just this. Obtaining legal registration for MCC in Japan and an import license were time-consuming

processes. There were personal and family matters. The Thielman's son, Albert, initially attended a local Japanese school, but found this to be very difficult since he spoke no Japanese, so he was later enrolled in a school for the children of U. S. military personnel. Albert and Linda eventually learned to play with the neighborhood children, even though "some of them were not very clean" and they became fluent in children's Japanese. There are also references in the correspondence to occasional illnesses. Albert contracted TB, which eventually prevented the Thielmans from continuing on in Japan as MB missionaries after completion of their term with MCC. Mr. Thielman was very ill with "double pneumonia" shortly before their return to Canada in 1952. On Sunday mornings the family attended worship services on a nearby U. S. Army base.

Henry G. Thielman was frequently invited to address meetings, church-related and otherwise, to explain Christianity and the work of the Mennonites. His voluminous correspondence includes many exchanges with the Church World Service, Dr. Kagawa, and many others including MCC people and MB leaders and friends in North America. He wrote letters on behalf of students who wanted to study in Canada or the U.S. His English language correspondence includes some idiosyncrasies that betray the fact that English was his second language, and it is my impression that his letters, written in his "mother tongue" of German, are longer than what he wrote in English.

He mentions frequent trips to Tokyo to negotiate business and government matters and to meet visitors who arrived in Yokohama. And there were other incidental activities, such as letters to an MB family in Oklahoma whose son was an American soldier injured in Korea and recuperating in Japan. Mr. Thielman offered to visit the young soldier in Nagoya, but the soldier traveled with some friends to Osaka to visit the Thielmans there instead of in Nagoya.

This is only one of many indications that the Thielmans were extremely hospitable people. I have already mentioned that Alice Fast and the two Ressler sisters lived on the grounds of the Center, but there were many other guests, missionary and other, who were welcomed by the Thielmans and stayed with them for longer and shorter periods of time. The Carl Beck and Ralph Buckwalter families, missionaries sent to Japan by the Mennonite Church, resided in the Center when they first arrived and the Beck family was with the Thielmans for more than one



year while the Becks studied the Japanese language. When the General Conference mission board began to send missionaries to Japan, Mr. Thielman met them and the Center provided them with a temporary place to live. In June, 1950 Mr. Thielman reported that nine MB and GC missionaries had arrived during the summer and were offered temporary housing by the Center, prompting Mr. Thielman to ask MCC headquarters whether they supported this use of their time and the MCC facilities to greet and house new missionaries. In addition to this, there were periodic official visits from MCC leaders, including J. N. Byler, E. E. Miller, Orie Miller and Bill Snyder. The Thielmans always expressed appreciation for the fellowship that they enjoyed with their many visitors and guests, whether Mennonites of various kinds or “from many other denominations.” During the Christmas season, 1951, they hosted 125 missionaries for a Christmas dinner at the Center.

As is implicit in what I have already reported, it is also clear in his correspondence that Henry Thielman was as concerned about the “spiritual” condition of the people he served as he was about their physical, material, social, and psychological wellbeing. He led “devotions” each morning before work began in the sewing center. His letters include numerous requests for Bibles, hymnals, and song books. He was invited to speak about Christianity in many different settings. In fact, Mrs. Thielman stated that he received far more invitations than he could accept. Henry and Lydia reported many visits to Japanese homes for conversations that included talk about Christian faith. In March, 1951 Henry Thielman wrote: ‘It is my prayer that many may be won for Christ.’ And in May, 1951 he wrote that “Much of our work is to deal with individual souls, listen to their problem and try to help them by pointing them to Christ”

In his report after his evaluation visit to the Relief Center in Osaka in February of 1951, MCC administrator E. E. Miller wrote:

This unit at this place has done a very commendable piece of work. They are making a good witness in this slum section of Osaka and they are also carrying through extension projects of a very commendable nature.

Mr. Miller also noted that “they are making many contacts of a definitely Christian nature.”

One of those contacts “of a Christian nature” was with Masaru Arita, who later became one of the leaders of the JMBC. Young Mr. Arita attended an English Bible class that was taught by Henry Thielman in the Tenma Church and Mr. Thielman introduced him to MB missionary Ruth Wiens, who had arrived in Japan just two weeks before their first meeting.

A bit of dissension among MCC personnel shows through in Henry Thielman’s report to MB mission executive A. E. Janzen in June, 1951: “It has been our aim to make this not only a social center as desired by some of the workers, but definitely Christian.”

Ruth Wiens was the first MB missionary to arrive in Japan, in August, 1950. In December, 1950, Mr. Thielman assisted Ruth Wiens in locating and purchasing property (formerly the large home of a medical doctor) in the Ishibashi area of Ikeda City. Ishibashi is a pleasant residential part of Ikeda City, a suburban city in what was then near the northern outskirts of Osaka Prefecture. The Ishibashi house became the main residence for the new MB missionaries and Ishibashi remains the center of MB and JMBC activity to this day.

There were other things for the Thielmans to deal with. MCC leader E. E. Miller commented during his visit in July, 1951 that Japan was very hot, and MCC administrator J. N. Byler from Pennsylvania wrote concerning his visit in February, 1951 that he had never been so cold in his life as he was in Osaka. More serious were a series of urgent letters sent to MCC headquarters in Akron in January, 1951 pleading for funds that had not arrived on schedule. He reported that all of the MCC workers had used all of the money they had available and they had borrowed as much as they could, and they had spent all of this. They did not know what they would do next if the funds did not arrive very soon. Mr. Thielman wrote that he knew that contributions to MCC had declined, but he was also sure that if MB people in North America had any idea of what living conditions were like for the poor people whom they were serving, they would surely give more. Service in Japan required adjustments of many kinds.

#### TYPHOON JANE

Since the Kasugade area in the Konohana district is located on a peninsula in Osaka Bay, it is vulnerable to flooding during typhoons, as people in the MCC Center learned when Typhoon Jane struck on Sunday, September 3, 1950. Ruth

Wiens had arrived a few days earlier and Miss Wiens' shipped baggage had arrived just the day before, so it was temporarily stored on the floor in a room in the Center.

Most of the MCC group attended the Sunday morning worship service in the nearby U.S. Army Chapel but nothing was said there about an imminent typhoon. Mrs. Thielman had remained at home and had heard warnings on the radio that a typhoon was coming so when Mr. Thielman returned home he made sure that all of the doors and windows in the center were closed so that MCC property would be as secure as possible. As the typhoon struck, the wind and rain were horrendous, but eventually it seemed that the worst had passed without too much damage. But then a policeman arrived at the Center to instruct the MCC people to leave immediately because severe flooding was about to begin. Mr. Thielman was ready to board people into their vehicle to escape when he realized that escape was impossible. There was already too much water, which was rising at a very rapid rate. According to Mrs. Thielman, the water rose seven feet in ten minutes. Water and mud in their buildings was four feet deep. Everyone quickly climbed the stairs to safety in the room above the garage. Mr. Thielman was the last to enter. He had to swim through the water to reach safety in the upper room. Thirty eight people were crowded into the room, which was "packed like sardines," with standing room only. They were without food, water, electricity or toilets. But at around midnight, according to Mrs. Thielman's account, some of their students approached the room in a boat, calling "Sensei (Teacher)! Are you alright?" The group was trapped in the room for three days before the salt water from Osaka Bay receded enough that they could leave. Mrs. Thielman reports that before the water receded, Henry removed the wooden *furo* (bath) and plugged the holes so that Mrs. Thielman could use the *furo* as a kind of boat, which Henry pushed from room to room so they could begin to survey the damage.

Needless to say, the damage was extensive, including to all of missionary Ruth Wiens' shipped baggage, which had to be cleaned and then dried. They saved what they could. Removing the mud and silt, repairing and repainting their buildings, and repairing the damage the salt water had done to their vehicle required over one month. The walls stayed damp for months. In the broader view, Typhoon Jane and the associated flooding killed 539 people on the Island of

Shikoku and in the large Keihanshin (Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe) area that included the Konohana district.

Of course a hectic schedule such as is clear in the Thielmans' reports, and experiencing traumatic events such as Typhoon Jane took their toll. Many (nearly a majority) of Henry Thielman's letters begin with an apology for being late in his correspondence. He was just too busy, he said. But he did manage to guard time for himself and his family to get away for vacations, in places like Kinosaki on the Japan Sea Coast and Lake Nojiri and Karuizawa, resort communities in the cool mountains of Nagano Prefecture. Karuizawa was a popular resort area and was the site of an evangelical conference center where the MB mission later purchased a rest home for their missionaries. Perhaps busyness and fatigue were also factors in the several incidents of illness that the Thielman's reported in their correspondence. Mrs. Thielman comments in her memoirs that during the three years they were in Japan her husband's hair had turned gray. As the date for their departure grew near, Henry Thielman commented repeatedly that their work in Japan had been "hard," or "not easy," but it had also been very rewarding.

Before they left Japan the Thielmans were publically honored for their work. After the typhoon, a children's center presented them with a plaque that read "Life-Saving Award, Typhoon Jane, 1950" for the help he had given "to many people who were in distress." Mrs. Thielman wrote:

Before we left Japan, the city officials from the Konohana district had a special farewell for us and presented several gifts to us including a book with hundreds of signatures in it from people with whom we had dealt. My husband also received a bronze medallion from the Governor (of the Prefecture). Many people personally came to our house and also the station to wish us well and say goodbye. It was heartwarming!

Mr. Thielman also received a commendation from Osaka Mayor Kondo.

At the end of her memoir Mrs. Thielman appended an undated article from an unidentified English-language newspaper. The article reviews the work of "The Osaka Social Service Center, Mennonite Central Committee" and says the following about the Thielmans: "Now 54 years of age (sic), Mr. Thielman, as director of the relief unit of the MCC in Japan, is a man of modesty while Mrs. Thielman is bright and cheerful, a valuable helper in her husband's work."

## GOING HOME TO CANADA

The original intention was that the Thielmans would continue on in Japan as MB missionaries after completion of their work with the MCC. The MB mission board did, in fact, extend an invitation to the Thielmans, but that became impossible when son Albert contracted TB. So they began to make arrangements to leave Japan during the early months of 1952. Unfortunately, Mr. Thielman became seriously ill with “double pneumonia” early in January. His fever rose to 104 F. degrees. For this reason, plus delays in the date of departure of the freighter on which they were to return to Canada, they did not leave Japan until March. Mr. Thielman was still weak from his illness and the doctors gave him permission to travel back to Canada only on the condition that he would have “complete rest.”

Unfortunately, that did not happen. Mrs. Thielman reports that their journey across the Pacific via the northern route was so rough that everyone on board, including the crew, suffered from seasickness. Only Mr. Thielman was spared. Immediately after their arrival in Vancouver, British Columbia, at midnight on April 5, 1952, the Thielmans began a very rigorous schedule of visits to MB and GC Mennonite churches across British Columbia. In BC they reported to 18 churches in 20 days, and then they continued on to Alberta where their busy schedule of reporting to churches continued. Later in the summer, in July, they did similar tours of MB and GC congregations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

They finally returned to their home in Kitchener, Ontario, late in May. Henry was 47 years old, Lydia was 45, Albert was 13, and Linda was 4 years old. In those days Mennonites were quite good at celebrating with missionaries and MCC workers who were recently returned from exotic far-away places. They were treated like celebrities. But Mennonites were not so good at meeting the practical and economic needs of these returnees. As MCC workers in Japan, all of the Thielmans’ expenses were paid, plus the family received \$10 per month for personal expenses, so they arrived back at home in Canada with no savings. And Mr. Thielman was unable to find employment. Mrs. Thielman reported that many times the children went to their refrigerator to look for food, but there was nothing there. Mr. Thielman was finally offered a job working in a slaughterhouse. His assignment in the mornings was to hold the slaughtered pig carcasses in

scalding water to aid in the removal of their hair and then in the afternoon he helped in cutting the carcasses into parts.

Needless to say, he continued to look for other employment. He was eventually able to find a better job working in the men's department in a local department store, where he was employed "for several years." During a time when the ideal was for women to remain in the home, Mrs. Thielman was employed as matron in the dining hall of the very small and short-lived Kitchener Mennonite Bible School. In January, 1957, five years after their return from Japan, the Thielmans were invited to serve in a rescue mission and help with a newly established MB church in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. So they left their then teen-aged son, Albert, with his grandmother in Kitchener and moved with daughter Linda to Calgary.

Rescue mission work involved meeting people and passing out tracts and playing a tape recorder on the "skid row" streets of Calgary. Later a hall was used for meetings, which eventually averaged about 125 persons, mostly men, almost all of whom were homeless and/or alcoholics. Henry preached a message and then sandwiches were given to those who were in attendance. The work was difficult and discouraging because even the homeless and alcoholic persons who had an experience of salvation often soon abandoned their new-found faith and returned to their old ways. But Henry eventually gained the confidence of these street people and he heard many tragic stories from their lives. Lydia Thielman reported that "those people longed for love and understanding."

Meanwhile, the new MB church in Calgary met in the basement of the small house where the Thielmans lived. Sunday School, Wednesday evening gatherings, choir practice, and Sunday morning worship services all happened in the basement of this small house.

After seven years in Calgary, the Thielmans began to think and pray about making a change in their ministry. To their surprise, they were suddenly invited by three different congregations to serve as their pastor. They finally decided to accept the invitation to the Clearbrook MB Church in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia. They moved to Clearbrook in February, 1964. The Clearbrook Church was large, with 700 members, and culturally conservative because they continued to offer German-language worship services as late as 1977. Whether to change entirely to English-language services was a divisive issue in Clearbrook (and in other MB

churches in those days), so they finally decided that 115 members would leave and establish a new all-English congregation that came to be known as the Bakerview MB Church. The separation was apparently by mutual agreement and congenial. MB missionaries to Japan, Ben and Esther Zerbe, later served as pastors in the Bakerview Church.

After the Thielmans had been in Clearbrook for four years, he had to resign because of some health issues. But one year later he was well enough to accept a new pastoral assignment in the nearby Yarrow MB church, where he served for another three years, until his retirement. During ten of these years when he was pastoring these large Canadian MB congregations, Henry Thielman served as a member of the MB mission board. After retirement the Thielmans moved back to Clearbrook in the spring of 1971 but Henry continued to preach in various churches from time to time. In 1980 he lost his eyesight so he could no longer read. In 1981 he suffered kidney failure and was forced to receive dialysis treatments. He died on April 29, 1985 in Clearbrook, three weeks after surgery on his kidneys from which he did not recover. He was 81 years old.

#### THE LEGACY OF HENRY G. AND LYDIA REIMER THIELMAN

It would not be appropriate to say that Henry Thielman was the “patriarch” of MB mission work in Japan because the Thielmans left before the main MB mission work began, but in many ways we might consider him to be the “progenitor.” He assisted in the “birth” of the MB mission. I will offer several generalizations about his legacy, some of which were carried on by the mission personnel subsequently sent to Japan by the MB mission board, but many were not. In many ways, the new MB missionaries moved the MB work in Japan in a very different direction.

##### 1. Integrated, Holistic Ministry.

In many ways the work of the Thielmans represented the kind of integrated, holistic ministry that is called for by contemporary missiologists. He and the relief unit responded to the broadest range of human need for which they had resources: material, medical, educational, and, of course, spiritual. The daily work of the center centered around what might be called “social ministries” but there was a seamless continuity between that and the “spiritual” work that was done in personal relationships and efforts toward the establishment of a Christian community. I detected no hint of the bifurcation of the “spiritual” and the

“material” that characterized much mission thinking at that time. Everything they did, whether relief work, personal witnessing, or laying the foundation for a church community was in the spirit of “In the Name of Christ.”

## 2. Ecumenical Openness.

The Thielmans went to Japan under a cooperative arrangement between the MB Board of Foreign Missions and the inter-Mennonite MCC organization, and they were apparently also open to relationships across a broad range of denominational diversity. The MCC Center distributed materials that they received from the Licensed Agencies for Asian Relief (LARA). LARA was an association of 13 Protestant agencies that joined in providing relief in the post-WW II years. The MCC relief center distributed food, clothing, and Christmas bundles donated by LARA. Mr. Thielman frequently communicated with Dr. George E Bott, who was the Director of Church World Service (CWS) in Japan. Dr. Bott had been a missionary sent to Japan by the Methodist Church of Canada in the pre-war years and was, therefore, fluent in Japanese. Dr. Bott assisted the MCC unit in a variety of legal and administrative matters. CWS was an agency that was supported by the American Federal Council of Churches (FCC), the Foreign Mission Council, and the U.S. branch of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Relationships between the MCC and Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa (1888 – 1960) were close, including the use of land owned by Kagawa’s organization, the “Kobe Jesus Band.” As I mentioned, Dr. Kagawa was a well-known Japanese evangelist, pacifist, Christian reformer, and labor organizer. MCC relief unit workers taught in the YMCA. MCC workers attended worship services in the Chapel on a nearby U.S. military base. And the Thielmans repeatedly mentioned how much they enjoyed fellowship with the many MC, GC, and MB missionaries with whom they had contact—and with people from “many other denominations.” I saw no indication that the Thielmans made any distinction between “liberal” and “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” Christians. In 1951 they hosted a Christmas gathering of 125 missionaries. All of the evidence that I have seen indicates that they were quite open to ecumenical relationships across a wide spectrum of denominations and organizations.



### 3. Cooperation with “Secular” Agencies.

Perhaps out of necessity the MCC unit coordinated its work with the appropriate governmental agencies, including the U.S military and an advisory committee from the local city welfare department that provided them with the names of persons in their area who were most in need of their services. They taught in schools, universities, businesses and churches. As I have indicated, they had occasional contact with U.S. military personnel and received two prefabricated buildings from the U.S. Army. During Christmas, 1951, the Center distributed pencils that had been donated by a Japanese department store, and they added pieces of candy and old, previously used Christmas cards as gifts. There was none of the sense of social isolation that has sometimes characterized isolationist “quiet in the land” Mennonites.

### 4. Hospitality.

The Thielmans apparently had a very low sense of boundaries between their personal and familial private space and the people around them. In Japan they were limitlessly hospitable to their fellow workers, the many missionaries who temporarily resided in the Center, and to the many other visiting travelers and administrators who passed through the Center. They seemed to demonstrate the same kind of love and understanding for their visitors and guests in Japan as they later showed to the homeless and alcoholic men in the Rescue Mission in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and to the members of the MB church in Calgary who used their home for many meetings and activities.

As I have reported, their work was highly evaluated by their MCC administrative leaders and was much appreciated by the Japanese people whom they served. But, as it turned out, there was not a lot of continuity between the work that the Thielmans did as MCC workers and the MB mission that was originally intended to build upon these foundations. In fact, Japanese people who had relationships with MCC personnel and programs were viewed as a “problem” in the early years of MB mission work. We can only wonder how the Thielmans might have impacted the future shape of MB mission work in Japan if they had been able to continue on as had been the original intension of all concerned.

## 8. GETTING STARTED: THE FIRST MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONARIES IN JAPAN AND THEIR EARLY DECISIONS

### MISSIONARY ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

When the Thielmans encouraged the MB Board of Foreign Missions to proceed with their plans to send missionaries to Japan, the Board responded by sending six missionary families and two single women missionaries during the four year period 1950 to 1954. Included in this group are the four men (Harry Friesen, Roland Wiens, Sam Krause and Jonathan Bartel) whom I am calling the “Founding Fathers” because they, operating under policies and priorities set by the Board and mission administrators in Hillsboro, Kansas, established the patterns that MB mission work would follow during most of the more than three decades that followed. Unfortunately, two of the original six families (Gaede and Balzer) and one of the single women (Rubena Gunther) had to leave Japan after just a few years because of illness.

Approximately ten years passed before the mission board sent another contingent of four missionary families and two single woman to Japan. During the years 1962-1964 the number of MB missionary personnel in Japan was approximately doubled. I am calling this second group “Reinforcements” because their mandate was mostly to continue to build on foundations that had been laid by the initial group of missionaries. The tenure with the MB mission of most of these “Reinforcement” missionaries was not very long. Pauline Peters (later Kliwer) served in Japan for four years, from 1963-1967. The Abe Koops arrived in 1962 but in 1970 they ended seven years of service under the MB mission and contracted directly as teachers with the Canadian Academy in Kobe, where they continued to serve for many years. Teaching at CA was their primary work during all of their years in Japan, so their impact on the JMBC was minimal. Also in 1970, the Ben Zerbe family returned to the U.S. after two terms with the TEAM mission in Tokyo and six years (1964-1970) with the MB mission in the Osaka area as pastors and church planters. In 1970 Rubena Gunther returned to the U.S. after six years (1964-1970) and our (Enns) family also returned in 1970 after serving as MB missionaries for three and one half years (1962-1966) and another two and one half years teaching in Osaka Shoin Women’s College as associates of the

mission (1968-1970). The Ivan Wohlgemuth family continued on, serving for a total of 18 years, 1964-1982. Each of us who left the mission after six or seven years of service had our own circumstances and our own reasons, but it is clear that the old conviction that the call to missions was a lifetime commitment no longer applied.

The tendency toward shorter terms of service was also true of the “Late Arrivals” who joined the MB mission during the next three decades (1970s-1990s). Three families arrived during the 1970s (Phil Hamm and Jim Totzke in 1976, Steve Friesen in 1979). Another family (Vern Stobbe in 1984) and one single woman (Doris Goertz in 1985) joined the mission during the 1980s. The Stobbes were contract English teachers who worked in Tokyo. They were officially related to the MB mission but they were not really a part of the MB work in western Japan so their contribution to the JMBC was also minimal. Finally, two additional families (Laurence Hiebert in 1993 and Randall Thiessen in 1997) arrived during the 1990s. Five of the six “Late Arrival” families served between five and eight years. The Laurence Hieberts served for 13 years and Doris Goertz continues to work in Japan in 2019 (after an interlude in North America). Again, individual situations varied, but it is clear that the old tradition of a life-long commitment to missionary service in one culture had changed.

## PROFILES OF MENNONITE BRETHERN MISSIONARIES

Complete information was not available to me in the archives (some of the records remain confidential), but I can offer several generalizations about the social and cultural characteristics that were shared by almost all of the MB missionaries in Japan. Almost all were descendants of MB immigrants from Russia, so most shared a common Russian-Mennonite ethno-religious heritage. All of the original long-term missionaries, including the four “founding fathers,” and most of the later arrivals were from the U.S. Only a minority were from Canada (Thielman, Balzer, Koop, Peters, Hamm, Hiebert, Goertz). Almost all grew up on farms or were from rural small towns. Few had lived in large cities for any length of time prior to their arrival in Japan. Almost all had received at least some of their education in MB schools. Almost all marriages were endogamous, meaning that both spouses shared the same social, cultural and religious characteristics.

Perhaps the most important background characteristics shared by MB missionaries in Japan was that all were young, in their mid-twenties, and none arrived in Japan with any substantial experience in church leadership. These young missionaries had graduated from a Bible institute, college, or seminary, served as assistant pastors or taught school for a few years at most, and were then sent to Japan as missionaries. It is easy to understand Rev. Kyou'ichi Kitano's long-standing plea that the mission board should send at least one mature, experienced church leader to serve in Japan for a period of several years to help establish the MB church in Japan. I will say much more about Rev. Kitano later.

The profile of the MB missionaries in Japan reflected many of the characteristics of most of the MB population in North America at that time: ethnically and racially homogeneous, rural and small town, at least some education in MB schools; and spouses who shared similar backgrounds (endogamy). Some of the exceptions in Japan were: The childhood homes of Roland Wiens and Jonathan Bartel were on mission compounds in China, and two wives (Stobbe and Thiessen) were Japanese. These shared social and cultural characteristics certainly contributed to the in-group solidarity that characterized the MB mission fellowship, though, as we shall see, this did not mean that there were not sharp theological and other differences, and sometimes conflicts, within the group. It also meant that it was difficult for new-comers and outsiders to enter the "in-group" of the long-term missionaries.

I will say nothing at all about the *many* other persons who served in Japan under the MB mission as short-term English teachers, construction workers, visiting evangelistic teams, etc. Neither have I gathered any information about the individuals and families who have served with the MB mission since 2000. Their contributions might have been substantial, but the focus of this report is on the work of the "Founding Fathers" and the contributions of the other early members of the MB Mission in Japan. I have also included a detailed account of the experiences of one Japanese leader, Rev. Kyou'ichi Kitano.

## THE FIRST STEPS

The first regularly appointed MB missionary to arrive in Japan was Miss Ruth Wiens who initially joined the Thielmans in the MCC Center in Kasugade. She arrived in August, 1950. The Harry Friesen and Harold Gaede families arrived

seven months later, in March, 1951. Four months after that, in July, 1951, the Roland Wiens family arrived in Japan from China where they had been serving as missionaries with the MB mission in South China that had been founded by Roland's father. In September of that same year (1951), Miss Rubena Gunther joined the MB mission in Ishibashi. She had spent the previous year teaching in a school for the dependents of American military personnel in Kobe. The Jonathan Bartel family arrived next, in April, 1952, initially to replace the Thielmans in the MCC Center when the Thielman family returned to Canada. The Sam Krause family also arrived in Japan during the spring of 1952. And, finally, the David Balzer family completed the founding contingent of MB missionaries when they arrived in Japan from Canada in 1954.

As I mentioned, Ruth Wiens first lived in the MCC Center but she and the Thielmans arranged for the MB mission to purchase a large residence previously owned by a medical doctor in Ishibashi in Ikeda City, a suburb on the northern edge of the greater Osaka area, so that is where the Friesen and Gaede families initially lived upon their arrival in Japan during the spring of 1951. They were soon joined in the Ishibashi house by Ruth Wiens and then the Roland Wiens family and Rubena Gunther, so eight adults and six children (14 persons) were living together in the large residence in Ishibashi, which had been somewhat remodeled by the missionaries. The mission purchased other properties in those early years: in Tsurugaoka in the southern part of Osaka, in Nagase in eastern Osaka, and the mission took ownership of the MCC property in Kasugade.

Like the Thielmans, two of these original families (Gaede and Balzer) and one of the single women (Rubena Gunther) had to leave Japan earlier than anticipated because of health problems. The Gaedes left after only two years, Rubena Gunther after three, and the Balzers after six years in Japan. Miss Gunther (later Mrs. Charles Ewell) returned to Japan later for additional service but the Gaedes' and Balzers' terms of missionary service were brief. The other "Founders" provided many years of missionary service in Japan: Ruth Wiens, 40 years; Harry and Millie Friesen, 33 years (plus additional time in Komaki, a suburb of Nagoya, during the late 1990s); Roland and Ann Wiens, 33 years; Jonathan and Alice Bartel, 31 years (also plus additional time in Komaki); and Sam and Renatta Krause, 32 years. So their commitments to MB mission work in Japan were long and deep, as was their impact on the identity and ministries of the JMBC. Four

men, Harry Friesen, Roland Wiens, Jonathan Bartel, and Sam Krause, in collaboration with two Japanese men (Rev. Kitano and Rev. Masaru Arita), were the “founding fathers” of MB mission work in Japan.

It did not take the newly arrived missionaries very long to begin their work. Ruth Wiens taught English and English Bible classes alongside the Thielmans and the other MCC workers while she lived with them in the MCC Center and was primarily engaged in Japanese language study. The other new missionaries were also busy with language study and remodeling their large missionary residence in Ishibashi.

The first MB worship service in Japan happened on Mothers’ Day in May, 1951, just a few months after the arrival of the new missionary families. The missionaries rented a clubhouse in their neighborhood in Ishibashi for a Sunday morning worship service. The missionaries were joined in this first MB worship service by the Thielmans and other MCC workers and 20 to 30 Japanese, some of whom lived in the neighborhood and others were students in English classes conducted by Ruth Wiens and other persons connected with the MCC Center. So nine foreigners and about two dozen Japanese participated in this first MB worship service. The first baptism took place in August, 1951, approximately one year after the arrival of Ruth Wiens, when three young men who were students in her Bible class received baptism. Masaru Arita, later to become one of the primary leaders of the JMBC, was part of this first group.

In many ways, the initial activities of the new missionaries were somewhat ad hoc, taking advantage of contacts in their neighborhoods, teaching classes in schools and businesses, distributing tracts, following up on work begun by the MCC and Youth for Christ, organizing camping programs, conducting worship services in homes and rented facilities, purchasing and remodeling residences, exploring options for moving to new areas, and, of course, investing large amounts of time and energy in Japanese language study. Many found learning the Japanese language was an enormous and time-consuming challenge that extended over several years. In April, 1953, two years after their arrival in Japan, Harry Friesen reported to A. E. Janzen that he was “not yet preaching in Japanese.” Early reports also indicated that they were required to spend large amounts of time and energy in accomplishing mundane activities such as

remodeling the Ishibashi house, purchasing and registering additional properties, obtaining, registering and maintaining automobiles, and doing all of the paper work that was required of foreigners trying to establish new organizations and acquire new properties in Japan. There was frequent communication via air mail between the missionaries and the mission administrators in Hillsboro, Kansas. A more intentional strategy for the future development of MB mission work in Japan was adopted by the missionary group during the fall of 1955, four years after their arrival.

### ADOPTING A MISSION STRATEGY

It is clear from all accounts that the missionaries were very serious in their desire to find and follow God's will in the methods that they used in conducting their work. Frequent mention is made of an important planning session that was held during four days, August 30 to September 2, 1955 at the MB Nosegawa campsite. Roland Wiens reported a brief summary of the meeting in a December, 1963 document, "Japan Mennonite Brethren Mission: 1950–1963":

It was in the fall of 1955 that the Japan MB missionaries were seeking definite guidance from the Lord as to long range plans for reaching the people of Japan. After five of the Brethren spent three or four days in prayer and fasting, the Missionary fellowship felt it was the Lord's will for us to concentrate on the mission in and around the Osaka prefectural area. The plan was to ring the city of four and a half million people with churches which would be lights to these teeming multitudes. We planned extended tent campaigns in the areas where we wanted to establish churches. We also started a fifteen minute weekly radio broadcast.

Roland Wiens mentioned only part of what was on the agenda during that important planning meeting. I will briefly summarize other items that are recorded in the minutes from the meetings at camp.

1. The first item on the agenda was an extension of the prayer and reflection that had been begun by the brethren during the days prior to the gathering. The time from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the first day was devoted entirely to prayer and "personal heart-searching."

2. The first item on the schedule for the second day was a testimony and “clarification of a doctrinal point” by the Balzers. The topic of concern was not identified in the minutes, but in an earlier report to the MB Board of Missions (March 20, 1955) David Balzer revealed that he was surprised to find that among the MB missionaries in Japan he and his wife were the only ones who did not teach “the security of a ‘believer’ who does not have fellowship with the Lord.” But, he continued, “By the grace of God the bond of love has been maintained.” This was not the last occasion when theological differences threatened the unity of the mission, and the “bonds of love” were not always so easily or successfully preserved.

3. During the afternoon session on the second day, the missionaries accepted Ezra 8:21 and 23 as a word of assurance of God’s presence in their work in Japan: “And there by the Ahava Canal I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we travelled... So we fasted and prayed that God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer.” Like many others in the tradition of Christian pietism, they were able to find comfort in this passage from the Old Testament, quite without regard for the larger literary or historical context. With other pietists, they were confident that any passage, phrase, fragment, or even a single word from the biblical texts might contain a message from God that spoke directly to their immediate situation. So they began their planning session with this assurance that God was guiding them in their work.

4. The most important and far-reaching decision that was made during the afternoon session was, as Roland Wiens indicated, to concentrate their work in the Osaka area, ringing the city with a series of congregations that were generally located near stations on the many public and private rail lines in the greater Osaka metropolitan area. One implication of this decision was that they would stop exploring options for church planting “west” of Osaka. This decision to plant a series of churches in one area also made possible the development of a “conference” of congregations who were in close enough proximity to develop a sense of corporate identity and to cooperate together in shared activities and programs. A conference of congregations could do things together that a single congregation could not do alone.



5. In keeping with the goal of developing an “indigenous” church, the missionaries agreed to invite Rev. Kyou’ichi Kitano to join them as an evangelist. Kitano-sensei was then invited to join the missionary group for their final session, during which he gave his testimony. The decision to invite him to join the group was then finalized, subject to consultation with the Japanese believers. I will say much more about relationships between Kitano-sensei and the MB mission later.

6. A decision was made to purchase a second residence in the Ishibashi area for use as a home for a missionary family, thereby further solidifying Ishibashi as the geographic center of MB work in Japan.

7. The missionaries decided to begin an “Every Believers’ Training Course” for their new converts that would meet two evenings per week during the months from November through March when tent evangelism was not possible because of weather conditions. Harry Friesen was given the assignment to teach the MB Confession of Faith and Rev. Kitano was asked to teach a course in personal evangelism. In many ways these courses were the predecessor of what became an MB Bible Institute program that later evolved into the cooperative Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS) and, finally, the JMBC Evangelical Biblical Seminary (EBS). Harry Friesen and Rev. Kitano were also given the assignment to prepare a “Handbook” that would include an MB Confession of Faith and some basic policies for the members and their churches. A serious concern for theological uniformity and programs of Christian education began early.

8. There was also discussion of “the war problem.” Since WW II had ended only ten years earlier, there were lively conversations throughout Japan about pacifism and the peace article in the new Japanese constitution. A decision was made to have Mennonite Church seminary professor Millard Lind’s *Answer to War* translated into Japanese (to be published by the “Protestant Publishing Company” rather than in Kagawa Toyohiko’s *Kirisuto Shimibun*). Distance between the MB missionaries and other Mennonites in Japan, and, especially, over “the peace issue,” grew greater over the next period of years.

9. And, finally, the missionaries voted to recommend to the mission board the purchase of a property in the Karuizawa resort area in Nagano Prefecture for use as a summer “rest home” for MB missionaries and their families.

In a long (six pages) report to mission Executive Secretary A. E. Janzen dated September 5, 1955, just two days after the end of the MB missionary gathering at the Nosegawa camp, Harry Friesen elaborated on the request to purchase the Karuizawa property and other points that were only briefly summarized in the minutes of the planning meetings. Getting away from the summer heat and humidity in Osaka, he said, was necessary because mission work in Japan was unusually stressful and, even dangerous, both physically and spiritually. He quoted medical doctors who claimed that the drop-out rate for missionaries for reasons of physical and mental health was higher in Japan than on other mission fields around the world, and Harry Friesen cited the health problems of the Thielman's son, Harold Gaede, and Rubena Gunther in the MB mission group. The Balzers' health issues came later. It was easy to contract diseases on the packed trains and busses and elsewhere in the crowded and busy city of Osaka. The Evangelical Mission Association of Japan and Keswick "deeper life" meetings in Karuizawa were necessary because of the ubiquitous presence of "liberals" and "modernists" in both the missionary and national church communities in Japan. Harry Friesen mentioned specifically the influence of Swiss "neo-orthodox" theologian Emil Brunner (who taught for a time in the International Christian University in Tokyo) and Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa, the preacher and social reformer who was the owner of the land where the MCC Center had been located. Fellowship with like-minded evangelicals was necessary for both the physical and spiritual renewal of missionaries who were engaged in constant battle with the "forces of darkness." And, also, the cost of the Karuizawa property (\$3,500) was very low because the owner was living in the United States and wanted to be paid in American dollars, which meant that few Japanese were in a position to purchase the 700 *tsubo* property with its 74 *tsubo* house. (Note: One *tsubo* is the size of two *tatami* mats, or about 36 sq. feet.) The mission administrators in Kansas agreed to this purchase.

Implicit in all of this was the overall goal of MB mission work in Japan, as elsewhere around the globe at that time: first, to bring individuals into a saving relationship with Christ; second, to gather these new believers into local congregations for fellowship, teaching, and witnessing; to organize these new groups into a "conference"; and to train leaders for the new congregations and for the various ministries of the conference. The primary goal of most

missionaries was to plant new churches, utilizing contacts made through personal relationships, distribution of tracts, teaching English and other classes, tent evangelistic campaigns, and following up with listeners to the radio broadcasts. Land for churches was purchased and buildings were constructed, partially with financial assistance from North America. For a number of years the funding formula was: one third of the funds were a gift from the MB General Conference in North America; one third was a loan to be paid into a revolving fund to assist in the purchase of properties for new congregations; and one third should be contributed by the new congregation. Once established, new congregations were turned over to Japanese pastors who had been trained by missionaries and then the missionaries moved on to evangelize in other new areas. The longer term goal was for the missionaries to “work themselves out of a job” as Japanese leaders took over all of the work. Establishing “indigenous” church communities was the ideal and avoiding the creation of financial “dependency” was a constant concern.

This basic pattern proved to be remarkably effective during the next three decades, by which time (around 1990) the “founding fathers” had retired, most of the “Reinforcements” had left the mission, and Japanese society and culture had changed almost beyond recognition. There were early intimations, though, that not all of the new converts remained steadfast in their commitment to Christ and the church. As early as September 29, 1955, Harry Friesen expressed concern that some of the “first fruits” were dropping away.

In retrospect, the “founding fathers” were utilizing the narrow theology of mission that MB missiologist, Doug Hiedebrecht and others, later called “Salvationist.” Not until many years later did the MB mission board move toward the kind of “Holistic” pattern of mission work that had actually characterized the ministries of the Thielmans and their co-workers in the MCC Center—but without the missiological terminology to describe what they were doing.

## SOME CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

One possible factor in the shorter tenure of the newer missionaries was noted in a report written by MB mission administrators J. H. Epp and Vernon Wiebe following their visit to Japan in April, 1972, just a few years after most of the “Reinforcement” missionaries had returned to North America. “The missionary force is a tightly knit group which makes it difficult for new workers to break into

the group.” The tight social cohesion that made it possible for the initial group to work together effectively, as the “Founding Fathers” did in Japan, is almost always accompanied by strong boundaries that make it difficult for outsiders to enter the group. That is what the mission administrators noticed during their visit in 1972 and it was undoubtedly at least one factor in the shorter tenure of almost all of the later arrivals.

Mixed messages about the need for additional missionaries were sometimes sent from Japan. The missionaries repeatedly asked for more missionaries to plant new churches and for more money to provide the “tools” (land and buildings) that were necessary if a church-planting effort was to succeed. The need was certainly great: the millions of Japanese of whom fewer than one percent were Christians. But Rev. Arita stated several times: “We do not need more missionaries. We need good neighbors and co-laborers.” (e.g. letter to J. H. Epp, August 12, 1966) Sometimes these differing messages were delivered almost simultaneously. The *Yearbook* of the 1961 MB General Conference reported on page 90 that the message delivered by Rev. Arita, who attended the Conference, was that no new missionaries were needed in Japan. In their report to the same Conference on the following page in the *Yearbook*, the mission board reported that the JMBC was asking for more missionaries. As I will report in Appendix I, there were also disputes about missionary assignments: specialized ministries such as student evangelism vs. “pioneer” evangelism and church planting.

Another contentious issue that was on-going was how to organize relationships between the mission on the field, the mission board and administration at home, and the national conference. This issue was by no means unique to the MBs because there is an extensive literature on the topic of “Integration” versus “Separation.” Some Japanese leaders, including Rev. Kitano, argued that the two entities, mission and local conference, should be together in one organization (“Integration”). He saw no reason why Japanese and foreign missionaries could not serve God together in one organization. But Rev. Arita felt that it was better to have two separate organizations because the Japanese Conference would remain weak and immature if there was only one organization. The missionaries would be too dominant. Most of the long-term MB missionaries in Japan resisted “integration.” After a visit to Japan in November 1982, mission administrator Peter Hamm reported that it was the opinion of the MB missionaries that

“Integration is impossible in Japan because Japanese refuse to accept foreigners.” Hamm also reported that it was the opinion of missionary Sam Krause that at that time the JMBC was “stifling” church planting, so the missionaries needed to be independent of the conference so they would be free to do their own work.

As reported earlier, beginning in 1957 it was official MB mission policy that all missionaries should serve at the will of and under the direction of the national conferences. In order to accomplish this, mission administrative bodies on the fields were changed to “fellowship” groups. All administrative decisions except for missionary salaries, living expenses, housing, children’s education, etc. were to be negotiated directly between the national conferences and the mission administration in North America. These policies were implemented in different ways on different fields, but in Japan the missionaries and the JMBC received permission to create a “Field Council” to facilitate coordination between the JMBC and the work of the missionaries, which remained separate. The membership of the Field Council consisted, for a time at least, of three representatives from the group of missionaries and three representatives from the JMBC. This arrangement undoubtedly alleviated some of the problems, but it did not prevent Sam Krause from feeling that church planting efforts were being “stifled” by the Conference.

My focus is on the founding *fathers* because in the early years missionary wives and “single sister” missionaries had no formal role in church leadership or in decision-making within the mission. Women were not permitted to vote on any matters other than the social activities of the missionary fellowship. Their contributions were undoubtedly important, but they were more indirect and informal than that of the men. Most of the important decisions that gave early shape to what became the JMBC were made by four foreign missionary men (Friesen, Wiens, Bartel and Krause) and two Japanese leaders, Rev. Kitano and Rev. Masaru Arita. This understanding of the subordinate role of women in the work of the church undoubtedly reflected the convictions of most MBs in North America at that time, but, needless to say, there were on-going misunderstandings, tensions and frustrations. Some of the “Founding Father” missionaries saw no positive role for “single sister” missionaries in Japan and argued publically that no more single women should be sent to Japan as missionaries. However, the mission board and administration insisted that the

missionaries should make space for women missionaries to serve. Among many other contributions by MB missionary women in Japan were Ruth Wiens' decades-long role as teacher in the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, Osaka Biblical Seminary, and Evangelical Biblical Seminary, plus her advocacy for and development of materials for the Christian education of children. Rubena Gunther worked for many years in the radio ministry and in the founding and development of the Kuwana MB church following typhoon Ida that devastated the Nagoya area in September, 1959.

The shared social characteristics and these and other "contentious issues" were part of the "earthen vessels" in which the Christian gospel was carried to Japan by MB missionaries.

### SOME SECOND THOUGHTS

The early missionaries sometimes mentioned that they had some reservations about what they were doing. First, I noted several comments that perhaps there might be other ways of establishing congregations that are not so dependent on the use of costly land and buildings and fulltime professional pastors. Perhaps relying on the use of expensive buildings and professional clergy to plant and nurture a Christian community will not be sustainable in the long term. But I saw no proposals for what such an alternative, more appropriately "contextualized" form of church might look like. Our imaginations failed us. But that is equally true in the "post-Christian" west, too. Heidebrecht and others faulted the MBs and evangelicals generally for not developing a clear theology of the church (ecclesiology).

A second matter about which I noted a few expressions of second thoughts was how congregations and the JMBC were organized. Support for the many programs and activities of the congregations and conference required complicated organizational structures and the investment of huge amounts of time, energy and money, all of which were in short supply. Perhaps there were too many groups, programs, activities, and committees. Some of the missionaries expressed concern about this, and so did Rev. Arita.

This matter of the overwork that resulted from excessive organizational complexity is painfully apparent in the experience of Harry Friesen. In a six page letter (single-spaced with narrow margins, dated May 5, 1962) to mission

administrator J. B. Toews, Harry Friesen made a passionate plea for secretarial or administrative help. Both Harry Friesen and his wife, Mildred, he wrote, were exhausted from work that began early in the morning and continued through the day until late at night. They had no time or energy for their own spiritual nurture, for personal conversations with students or others, for preparation, or for their own children. Harry Friesen provided a list of his many responsibilities: Chair of the MB mission in Japan; President of Osaka Biblical Seminary; Chair of the OBS Board of Directors; Chair of the MB mission Education Committee; Chair of the Constitution Committee of the JMBC; Chair of the JMBC Reference and Counsel Committee; Chair of the Radio Committee; Chair of and legal representative of the mission Religious Incorporation (*shuukyou houjin*); Chair of the Relief Committee of the Japan Council of Evangelical Missions; Member of the MB Field Council (three missionaries, three JMBC members); Member of the JMBC Evangelism Committee; Member of the Board of the Pacific Broadcasting Association; Responsible for the Ishibashi MB church (three Sunday a.m. messages each month, weekly Bible study for prayer meetings plus monthly communion service); Responsible for Neyagawa Chapel (weekly Sunday evening messages); Responsible for Amagasaki Church (monthly message and communion); Full-time teacher in OBS (ten class sessions each week); Responsible for property management for the seminary, the "Ishibashi Station," and the Nosegawa Camp. Harry Friesen also mentioned that he was the father of six children. He did not even mention the many letters and reports that he sent to the MB mission office in North America, which must have been an additional very time-consuming task. His letter continued:

The counseling, speaking engagements, consultations, planning meetings, faculty meetings, incorporations and land purchasing details. Our telephone rings almost all day long and the door bells constantly or students coming to borrow the phone or calls coming for them and we have no secretary to answer the phone or bells and Mrs. Friesen can hardly keep up with it all... It is a constant source of frustration to have so many responsibilities and not do any one thing well... Often we are forced to take the receiver off the hook to get a moments rest... We need a fulltime man helper and he could be kept busy with just relieving me of myriads of tasks.

I will offer three observations: First, Harry Friesen was at that time (1962) clearly *the* central person in both the MB mission in Japan and in the JMBC. J. B. Toews, in his report on his visit to Japan in 1957 noted that then already two families exercised a dominant influence in the work of the mission. The Friesens were one of those families. Whether by default or by personal inclinations, Harry Friesen gravitated to positions of responsibility and leadership. He was clearly recognized as a gifted man, but he was also constantly close to the edge of “burn-out.”

Second, with this as a model for what church leadership involved, it is little wonder that the JMBC decided to forgo cooperation in the Osaka Biblical Seminary, as I report below. The demands for both time and money appeared to be too great for the JMBC to bear. And, finally, this demonstrates one of the problems with “indigenization” as the goal of missions. If indigenization means that nationals simply replace missionaries in leadership roles, that means passing on without critical reflection institutions and roles that are problematic. Advocates of “contextualization” call for a different approach. Patterns of church life that fit the context in small towns in North America were not necessarily appropriate in urban Japan—nor in the post-modern, post-Christian west, either.

Nevertheless, the work of the early MB missionaries in Japan was remarkably successful. In spite of some setbacks and complications, the numbers of both congregations and members grew at a steady pace over a period of more than two decades. The missionaries also managed to produce a sufficient supply of Japanese men to serve as pastors of the new congregations. Few other mission organizations in Japan could report similar rates of success, and, as we shall see, Japan was the most successful of the mission efforts initiated by the MBs in the post-World War II period. It is highly unlikely that this level of success could have been achieved without the contributions of some strong Japanese leaders. It is to the story of one of these men that we turn next.

## 9. WORKING TOGETHER: THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND FRUSTRATIONS OF REV. KYOU’ICHI KITANO

Two Japanese men are central in correspondence between the MB mission office in Hillsboro, Kansas, and the mission “field” in Japan: Rev. Kyou’ichi Kitano and Rev. Masaru Arita. Volume of correspondence is not necessarily an accurate indicator of the importance of church leaders, but it is clear from the contents of



the records in the mission archives that these two men did, indeed, play a very important role in giving early shape to the JMBC. Because there is much more information available concerning Rev. Kitano, I will focus on his experiences with the MB mission. Japanese language materials are more readily available on the life and ministry of Rev. Arita.

I have provided a fairly long review of the life of Rev. Kitano for three reasons: First, he played an important role in the early years of the MB mission in Japan, in the development of the JMBC, and as a faculty member in the MB Bible Institute and at OBS. Several people expressed, in writing, their gratitude to Rev. Kitano for his good contributions. Second, his experiences provide an extreme example of the complicated relationship between the Christian gospel and the earthen vessels in which that gospel is carried. His positive contributions were great, but so were the conflicts in which he became embroiled. And, third, the story of Rev. Kitano's relationship with the MB and other missionaries in Japan and with the mission administration in Hillsboro, Kansas illustrates many of the challenges that had to be faced during those early years of mission work and the development of the JMBC. It was easy to celebrate mission successes and the rapid growth of the MB church in Japan, but there were also conflicts, and many of the conflicts were the result of unclear and problematic organizational arrangements. These intertwined realities, the good and the bad, are reflected in the fact that the mission archives contain a much greater volume of correspondence between Rev. Kitano and the MB mission leadership in North America than with any other Japanese person. The story of Rev. Kitano and the MB missionaries is one extreme example of many other similar but less dramatic accounts.

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Kyou'ichi Kitano was born in 1898 in Ikuno, a mountain village in the Asago district in Hyogo Prefecture, near the center of Honshu, Japan's main island. Ikuno was a mining town for 1000 years, since 807, producing silver, copper, coal, gold, and lead. The population in 1955 was about 11,000 but declined to 4,875 by 2003 because mining operations ended in 1973. Ikuno was merged with the larger town of Asago in 2005. A castle in the town was used for a time as headquarters for mining operations, but was eventually abandoned.

K. Kitano graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo in 1924 with a major in political and economic studies. Since he was born during the 31st year of the Meiji period, graduated from Waseda during the 23rd year of Taisho, and retired in the 43rd year of the Showa Era, his life spanned a very tumultuous time in the history of Japan, including the defeat of his nation in WW II in 1945.

I have no information concerning the social location of the Kitano family in Ikuno in what must have been a very complicated local social structure, but in his account of his conversion to Christianity Rev. Kitano states that his family was devoutly Buddhist, though he does not include information about the school of Buddhism to which his family belonged.

There are several indications that Rev. Kitano was a highly intelligent and well-educated man. First, like others who are well-schooled in the social sciences, his analyses, whether of things Buddhist or Christian, consistently linked the current situation with the historical past. He was well aware of the importance of the historical and social contexts. Second, his written English was very good. Of course some residuals of “Japanese English” remain. After all, he was not primarily a scholar of the English language. At first I suspected that he must have had editorial help with his English language documents, but when I read letter after letter in handwritten cursive script, I became convinced that his written English was simply very good. And he tried to be a serious scholar. In several places he mentioned that his regular schedule was to get up at four a.m. to prepare for his lectures in the seminary.

In 1960, approximately five years after his first contact with the MB missionaries, Rev. Kitano was invited to represent the JMBC during the centennial celebration of the North American MB General Conference in Reedley, California since he served as chairman of the JMBC at that time. He spent about four months in North America, visiting churches in both Canada and the U.S. In preparation for the presentations that he would make to church and other groups in North America, he authored a series of short (three to seven pages) papers on a variety of topics: his conversion story, the religious situation in Japan, mission work in Japan, etc. I will summarize a few of his papers because they reflect some of his thinking about the Christian faith and life. These ideas must have impacted his

students in the seminary who later became JMBC pastors. Much of what follows is based on these writings.

## CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY AND INITIAL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MB MISSION IN JAPAN

In his account of his conversion to Christianity (undated but probably written around 1960), Rev. Kitano described how his family, though Buddhist like “90% of the Japanese people,” practiced the rituals but knew very little about the actual teachings of Buddhism. He studied Buddhism himself, he said. He learned enough to gain a “superficial” understanding. During his student days at Waseda University, K. Kitano was influenced by the thought of a Professor Uchigasaki in his department of politics and economics. He followed his professor in believing that combining “Kaiser and Jehovah” led to slavery. Both political and religious freedom were necessary for the building of a better society. He became conceited with the confidence that he knew the answer to every problem. “I was utterly deceived by this vain pagan religion and by that superficial thought.” He worked for a time after graduation in an unspecified “political movement.”

A sister who was six years younger than K. Kitano converted to Christianity when she was a teenager, but she was the only other member of his family to do so. Prior to his own conversion, Rev. Kitano reported that he was highly critical of his sister for her Christian faith. He teased and persecuted her relentlessly, he said. His sister passed away while she was still a teenager. On her deathbed she exhibited such a “tranquil peace and marvelous hope” that K. Kitano was moved to reconsider his situation in life. He described how he sat in front of the family *Butsudan* reflecting on “What is life? What is death?” but he received no answer. He concluded that the only reason for living was to “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” But then he began to read his sister’s Bible, and when he was 27 years old, he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior. Everything changed for him. “The job which I had been doing was political, a movement for which I studied and prepared myself in the University. It seemed to promise worldly success to me, but I gave up all of my worldly ambition.” He was ordained as a minister in the Eastern District of the Methodist Church in Japan.

But he left the Methodist Church because of unspecified compromises that he was required to make. He served for a time as pastor of the Hamadera Bible

Church in Osaka. The Hamadera Bible Church has some connection with the Pentecostal Full Gospel movement but I have no information about Rev. Kitano's experiences there, nor do I know anything about the circumstances under which he left his position as pastor. Harry Friesen mentioned that Rev. Kitano worked with "several" evangelical groups prior to his involvement with the MB mission and the JMBC, but I have not been able to find any detailed information about his early ministerial career.

During 1954 and early 1955, Rev. Kitano was invited to serve as evangelist in several of the newly founded MB churches and he also served as speaker in the MB Nosegawa Camp during the summer of 1955. By the time of the missionary planning session during the fall of 1955, the MB missionaries were quite familiar with Rev. Kitano. During their planning retreat they decided to invite him to serve full time with the MBs as an evangelist and teacher. Harry Friesen reported to the mission office in Kansas that Rev. Kitano expressed full agreement with the MB Confession of Faith and that he was supportive of Mennonite convictions concerning peace and non-resistance. Rev. Kitano apparently also enjoyed the support of the Japanese church members, so he began his fulltime work with the MB mission and Conference in late 1955.

These arrangements appeared to be favorable to both Rev. Kitano and to the MB mission. Virtually every mission enterprise in Japan was eager to establish an indigenous church and most realized that it would be highly advantageous to have a mature, experienced Japanese minister to assist the missionaries, most of whom were not only foreigners but they were still young and inexperienced. In 1955 all of the MB missionaries were still in their early 30s. The problem was that there were few Japanese ministers available who shared the evangelical convictions of the MBs and many other recently arrived missionaries. It is easy to understand why the MB missionaries were sure that Rev. Kitano was an extraordinary gift from God to assist in furthering their work in Japan.

Rev. Kitano, too, seemed to be very happy with his new-found spiritual home. He frequently bemoaned the fact that the evangelical movement in Japan was small, weak, and lacking in resources. All too often, he reported in several places, Japanese Protestants were forced to choose between groups that were either "liberal" and "modernist," or they represented an "extreme Pentecostalism." He

shared with the MBs their antipathy towards both of these undesirable alternatives. He was happy enough with the MBs that he and his family were willing to accept a position with financial arrangements that were vague and uncertain. He agreed that he and his family would be mostly dependent on God and the financial support of the members of the MB congregations, which were still small and weak.

From the mission point of view, asking the Kitano family to rely on the support of the Japanese church members was an important step in the direction of establishing an indigenous church. Japanese church workers should be supported, for the most part at least, by Japanese church members, though the mission recognized that it might be necessary to temporarily supplement what the church members were able to provide. From the point of view of the Kitanos, accepting financial dependence on the church was an act of faith that God would provide. The mission did assist the Kitano family by providing them with housing, as was often part of the arrangement between employers and employees in Japan. They lived for a time in an apartment on the former MCC property in Kasugade but they moved to a mission-owned “teacherage” in Ishibashi when the MB Bible Institute moved from Kasugade to Ishibashi in 1959. The family later moved to a private residence in Toyonaka that was initially purchased by the mission for their use. The Kitano family finally negotiated with the mission to obtain ownership of this residence. As will be clear, these ill-defined arrangements resulted in many benefits to the MB mission, to the fledgling JMBC, and to the Kitano family, but very serious misunderstandings and open conflicts eventually emerged between all of the parties that were involved.

Rev. Kitano lived through three Imperial eras and the defeat of his nation in WW II; moved from the small mining town in the mountains of central Hyogo Prefecture where he grew up, to the great metropolis of Tokyo where he graduated from an elite private university and became active in a political movement; converted from the traditional Buddhism of his family to Christianity, first the Methodist version where he was ordained as a minister, but which he later rejected as too “liberal” and “modernist,” to a more Pentecostal congregation where he served as a pastor, and then finally to the Japanese MB version of a narrow and dogmatic fundamentalism and dispensational Protestantism. With this complicated personal history, it is no surprise that Rev.

Kitano was a complicated and sometimes difficult person. The correspondence and other materials in the MB mission archives indicate that Rev. Kitano was, indeed, a complicated and sometimes difficult person. His legacy includes highly positive contributions to both the MB mission and the JMBC, but his legacy also includes a record of misunderstandings and conflicts with the MB and other missionaries and with the fellow believers in Japan with whom he served. His story illustrates the truth that the Christian gospel is always carried in “earthen vessels.”

## POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MB MISSION AND THE JAPAN MENNONITE BRETHREN CONFERENCE

I will briefly summarize some of the concerns and suggestions that Rev. Kitano expressed in his correspondence with the MB leadership in Kansas and in the brief essays that he wrote. I will provide brief synopses of some of his essays because these ideas were undoubtedly part of what he preached as an evangelist and preacher and taught in the schools that prepared young Japanese for their ministries as pastors of MB (and other) churches.

1. Concerning Buddhism. In September, 1958, Rev. Kitano wrote a six page article, “A Study of the Significance of the *Butsudan*,” that he apparently intended for publication in the English language missionary journal, *Japan Harvest*. In his article, he traced the origins of Buddhistic ancestral observances in Japan back to the time of the Emperor Tenmu in 685, and then he traced the origins of the familial system of ancestral practices in Japan back to the sixteenth century when the Tokugawa Shogun (*bakufu*) instituted the *danka* system of organizing families (*ie*) into groups as part of the government’s system for exercising control over the population. Each household was required to register with a local Buddhist temple that provided the funerals and ancestral observances that had long been an important part of the Japanese tradition. Households (*ie*) were also organized into small groups of five family units (*danka*) that were responsible to and for one another to maintain compliance with the demands of the government of the Shogun (*bakufu*). One of the goals of the *danka* system was to guarantee that no member of any household within the group would become a Christian, the foreign religion of the colonial powers that threatened the well-being of the Japanese people.

The *Butsudan*, literally “Buddha-shelf,” is a kind of cabinet, large or small, depending on the class level of the family, that contains various objects such as a small bell and an incense burner that are used in rituals that commemorate the memory of deceased members of the household. Rev. Kitano made the case that the *Butsudan* represented much more than simply respect for, or even idolatrous worship of, the ancestors. The *Butsudan* was a symbol of the linkage between the household (*ie*), the Buddhist temple (*tera*), and the *danka* system, which was an instrument of the manipulative, oppressive government of the Shogun. By the middle of the twentieth century, the household of virtually every person in Japan who was an heir (usually the eldest son) included a *Butsudan*. So, Rev. Kitano wrote, the *Butsudan* not only represented idolatry, but it was also part of a very big business. Destroying the *Butsudan* represented much more than simply ending an idolatrous religious practice. It also meant liberation from an oppressive political, economic, cultural and social system. Understanding all of this should make it easier for Japanese Christians to destroy their *Butsudan*. “Let us, therefore, with bold and earnest determination labor toward the enlightenment of the masses against the ‘danka system’ which has been such an effective tool in the devil’s hand for so many years.”

2. Concerning Christianity in Japan. In several of his papers, Rev. Kitano reviewed the history of Christianity in Japan. In December, 1960, he wrote a seven page paper, “A Brief History of Evangelism in Japan.” As was evident in his paper on Buddhism, it is clear that Rev. Kitano had studied and carefully considered the history of Christianity in Japan. His account begins with the arrival of the Jesuit missionary, Father Xavier, from Macau in 1549. He introduced several of the early Protestant missionaries who arrived in Japan after the U. S. naval Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 forced the Japanese government to open the country to relationships with the outside world and he summarized some of the work of missionaries such as Guido Verbeck in Nagasaki. He outlined some of the work of other early Protestant missionaries and the legacy of the three famous “bands” of young Christian students who succeeded their missionary founders in Sapporo, Kumamoto, and Yokohama.

Of greatest relevance to this study is what Rev. Kitano had to say about the state of Christianity in Japan in 1960. Prior to WW II, he said, there was not much of an evangelical or fundamentalist presence in Japan. That changed in the post-war

years when there was an influx of evangelical mission organizations and there were mass-evangelism campaigns conducted by Billy Graham, Bob Pierce, and others. Many souls were saved, Rev. Kitano said, but the total number of Protestant Christians in Japan did not increase substantially because as new people arrived as new members in the churches, nearly as many left after just a few months or years of attendance. “I do not think our MB churches in Japan are any exception to this pattern, except those which have just begun recently.” This generalization is consistent with comments made by MB missionaries Jonathan Bartel and Harry Friesen. Jonathan once stated that an astonishing 90% of the people who joined their MB churches left after a short period of time. Harry Friesen’s comments were more figurative: “Some of the early fruit fell away,” he said, and “In our eagerness to give birth to Isaacs, we actually produced some Ishmaels.”

Rev. Kitano offered a list of reasons why so many Japanese converts, MBs included, did not remain with their churches. First, Japanese people tend to make intense commitments but then their enthusiasm quickly cools. Second, unlike the supportive cultures and societies in European and North American Christendom, the surrounding culture in Japan is secular rather than supportive of the Christian life. Family and cultural traditions remain strong. But, he concludes, “The greatest cause of these regrettable conditions is the shortage or lack of careful, fully consecrated pastoral work.” We will return later to some of his suggestions for improving the quality of pastoral work in Japan.

Protestant Christianity in Japan is divided into four categories, he said. The largest, oldest, and strongest Protestant groups are the “liberals” and “modernists.” Most of the churches of the Japanese national *Nihon Kirisuto Kyoudan* are of this type. One reason these churches are large and strong is because of the support they receive from the liberal National Council of Churches in America. The second category of churches are the fundamentalists and evangelicals. They are mostly new to Japan and they remain small in number and weak in influence in Japanese society. The third category is the variety of churches that Rev. Kitano grouped together under the label of “Heresies.” In this category he included the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the “extreme tongues movement.”



Several times in his writings Rev. Kitano mentions the *Mukyoukai* (Non-church) movement, as the fourth type of Protestant Christianity in Japan. *Mukyoukai* was founded by Kanzou Uchimura during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and remained strong in 1960, with well-known Japanese intellectuals such as Dr. Tadao Yanaihara, then President of Tokyo University, as adherents. Rev. Kitano listed several criticisms of *Mukyoukai*: They rejected the historic Christian practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; they saw no need for formal church membership; and they did not think foreign missionaries had any place in the work of the church in Japan. (Some Mennonites did not share Rev. Kitano's largely negative view of *Mukyoukai*. In fact, Paul Peachy, MCC peace worker in Japan (1957-1960), Mennonite sociologist, and long-time professor in the Catholic University of America (1965-1987), wrote an article published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* ("*Mukyokai-shugi*, A Modern Japanese Attempt to Complete the Reformation," January, 1961) in which he praised *Mukyoukai* as the logical fulfilment of the Reformation of European Christianity that began with Luther and Calvin, was carried a few steps further by the Anabaptists, and culminated in the "non-church" form of Christianity taught by Uchimura and his followers. Needless to say, articles such as this only served to widen the divide between the MBs in Japan and other Mennonite individuals and groups.)

Rev. Kitano concluded his paper by saying that the Japanese people had made much material progress since the end of the war but that they remained in "spiritual darkness." Traditional Buddhism and Shinto remained strong, and the so-called "New Religions" in Japan (e.g. Soka-Gakkai and Tenrikyou) were growing. Deep-seated prejudices against Christianity continued. He welcomed and was grateful for the contribution that foreign missionaries were making to the growth of the church in Japan.

Another undated and unsigned handwritten three-page paper (stamped with the date January 9, 1969) so closely resembles both the handwriting and the thoughts of Kitano-sensei that I am fairly confident that he is the author. The title of the paper is "A Paper on How a Japanese Christian Look (sic) at Foreign Missionary, Especially from the Standpoint of a Teacher at Bible Seminary." The focus in the first part of the paper is on the educational level of Japanese pastors. At that time (1969), only one of thirteen Japanese MB pastors was a university graduate. This is a reflection of the "lower middle class" level of society in which the MB

missionaries were working, he said. Of course higher education is not “absolutely important” in the development of churches, but “anti-intellectualism” will result in weak leadership in the churches. Unless pastors can overcome their own “inferiority complex,” it will be impossible to attract the capable young men who will lead the churches in the future. That is why, according to the paper, the ministry to university students of Mr. Ends (sic) and Miss Peter (sic) “was not effectually made use of by the churches.”

The focus in the second part of the paper is on the missionaries. Japanese churches have become independent of the missionaries and there are many calls for the missionary to “go home.” But the author does not agree that there is no longer any place for missionaries in Japan. There is a role for missionaries in cooperating with the churches in evangelizing Japan. But there is a “prerequisite” for missionaries who are chosen for service in Japan: They must be “truly qualified.” That means that the missionary must be able to read and write Japanese. “MB missionaries now cannot read Japanese newspaper, I am afraid.” The missionary must be superior to the Japanese in “learning and spirituality” so that the missionary can lead persons from the “upper class.” If a missionary cannot do this, it will be “tragic” for both the missionary and the churches because the churches will lack strong leadership. “But if the missionary is inadequate as a leader in American church, he must be inadequate in Japanese churches or society also... Useless workers in America will also be useless in Japan.” So American churches should send missionaries, but they should do so “sacrificially,” giving up some of their own best workers for service in Japan.

But Rev. Kitano’s contributions were not only intellectual and academic. He also helped with practical matters. Missionary correspondence includes numerous references to how he assisted them in negotiating financial matters such as the purchase of properties and in processing legal issues such as registering the mission and JMBC as legal entities. The missionaries were, after all, still young and inexperienced foreigners who continued to struggle with the Japanese language. It was enormously helpful to have the assistance of a mature, well-educated Japanese minister.

Rev. Kitano’s initial assignment with the MBs consisted of two areas of responsibility: He conducted evangelistic meetings and he was one of the two

teachers in the “Every Believers’ Bible Classes” for laymen that began in 1955. As I mentioned, Rev. Kitano taught a class in personal evangelism and Harry Friesen used the MB Confession of Faith as a main text in a series of class sessions on Christian doctrine.

Rev. Kitano was an advocate for using tent evangelism as an effective method for church growth. He supported a ten year plan for increasing the size of the JMBC. He was confident that a two or three week series of evangelistic meetings in a tent located in a strategically selected neighborhood, usually near a railway station, would attract sizable crowds; that several of these attendees would express enough interest in the Christian message to meet for follow-up Bible study classes; and that about 20 converts would be the eventual result of each tent crusade. The final result would be enough converts to begin the worship, fellowship, education, and other activities of a new congregation. It should be possible, he thought, to use this method to plant two new churches each year with about 50 members each, so that the total number of MB congregations should reach approximately 30 by the end of a ten year period.

Mission and Japanese church members needed to work together in these evangelistic and church-planting efforts, he thought. Missionaries had the resources to supply the tent, chairs and benches, organ, songbooks, tracts, and food, and to help with the lodging that were necessary for a successful campaign. Missionaries had the vehicles that were needed to transport workers and the necessary items from one location to another. Rev. Kitano did not think that establishing an indigenous church meant that Japanese Christians and foreign missionaries could not work together in one organization.

Rev. Kitano served as chairman of the JMBC from the time of its organization in 1957 until he resigned in 1963. Because of his position as chairman, as I mentioned, he was sent to North America to represent the JMBC in the celebration of the centennial of the history of the MB church (1860 to 1960) in Reedley, California. He visited churches and schools in both Canada and the U.S. over a four month period.

There are several indications that his visits and presentations were very well received. Mission administrator J. B. Toews, who was widely known as a stern and sometimes intimidating presence, used uncharacteristically warm language in

expressing his appreciation and affection for Rev. Kitano. In a letter dated January 3, 1961, for example, J. B Toews wrote to Rev. Kitano: "Our hearts have strangely melted together and we rejoice in the knowledge that it is our privilege to labor together with you in the outreach of the Gospel around the world, and in Japan in particular." The two men carried on personal correspondence even after Rev. Toews completed his term of service as mission administrator and moved to the MB seminary in Fresno in 1963. Rev. Kitano sought, and J. B. Toews offered his counsel on personal matters such as whether he should continue as chairman of the JMBC. Rev. Kitano expressed his thanks to Rev. Toews and the mission for arranging for him to travel first class on the President Wilson passenger liner that transported him across the Pacific Ocean back to Japan, an honor for which there was little precedent in MB circles, I am quite sure. Travel on official church business was almost always done by the least expensive mode possible.

The positive feelings were reciprocal. Rev. Kitano expressed great admiration for what he learned about MB leadership in North America. He reported that he had been told that there were two evangelical denominations in North America that were widely known for great preaching: the Southern Baptists and the Mennonite Brethren.

In his correspondence with J. B. Toews and later mission administrators, Rev. Kitano offered a series of suggestions and requests. In the first letter that is preserved in the archives, he asked for J. B Toews' opinion about instituting a system for planned giving in the MB churches in Japan. Financial stewardship in the new MB churches was haphazard and minimal, he said, so he wanted to begin a pattern for more structured, systematic giving. Such a system was in use in other churches in Japan and resulted in greater financial support for the churches. J. B. Toews responded that specific patterns might vary in different cultural contexts, but he agreed that teaching financial stewardship is part of what it means to live a responsible Christian life.

Rev. Kitano did not agree with the *Mukyoukai* movement that there was no place for foreign missionaries in the life of the church in Japan. In fact, he repeatedly suggested that Japanese and foreign church workers should be able to cooperate and serve together in one organization. He repeatedly offered another suggestion over a period of many years. He welcomed the long-term service of the MB

missionaries in Japan, and he appreciated the contributions of MB pastors and teachers from Canada and the U.S. who visited for short-term ministries, but he pleaded with the mission to send a mature and experienced church leader to serve in Japan for a period of at least two or three years. What the MB mission and church in Japan really needed was a “commander-in-chief” to help move the army forward. He appreciated the fact that the MBs in North America were sending people and money to support the work of the mission in Japan, but, he suggested, they needed to make the additional sacrifice of sending one of their strong leaders for a longer stay to help establish and stabilize the MB church in Japan. It would not be necessary for such a leader to spend the long period of time that it takes to learn the Japanese language. He could work through an interpreter. The mission did try to recruit such a person to serve for longer than just a few days or weeks, but the best they could do was send Dallas Theological Seminary Professor Dr. George W. Peters for a six-month period of teaching in the seminary, preaching here and there, and offering his missiological expertise to both missionaries and the JMBC.

Rev. Kitano offered his own analyses of problems facing the churches in Japan. As I mentioned, poor pastoral care, he said, was the main reason that so many new members left the church. For many years he was the only full-time Japanese teacher in the MB Bible school, then in the cooperative Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS), and finally in the MB Evangelical Biblical Seminary (EBS), so of course, he had ideas about pastoral preparation. First, the level of education in Japan is high, so pastors must be well-educated. They must understand the Bible and Christian theology, but they must also have a good understanding of their own culture and society. This takes time, especially when many prospective pastors have only recently graduated from high school and are very young. They should spend at least four years in school, he said, and then they should be apprentices for another period of time. Since the missionaries had a good understanding of the Japanese language and culture and were experienced in church leadership by that time, the missionaries could serve well as mentors for young would-be pastors. It is a big mistake to give young pastors (and other church members, too) responsibilities in the church for which they are not yet adequately prepared.

But he saw other problems in the churches in Japan. The sermons were too long and too complicated. A sermon should be short and simple. In fact, church

meetings in general were too long. Worship services should not be more than one hour in length, and they should be scheduled for earlier in the morning so women could return to their homes in time to prepare Sunday lunch for their families, since Sunday was the only day of the week when busy working men could spend time with their wives and children. Ending a worship service at noon was too late. Women's meetings (*fujinkai*) should be shorter, too, so Christian women could not be accused of neglecting their families. And Christian Education classes for children should be shorter because their attention spans are short and they are busy with many other things.

Rev. Kitano made other positive contributions. He supported the missionaries in their request for the purchase of a summer rest home in Karuizawa in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture. He served several of the local MB churches as interim pastor while the missionaries were away on leaves-of-absence for study or on furloughs for reporting and fund-raising in their home churches in North America. He also continued his interest in evangelism and church planting, attempting to begin his own new congregation in Suita and then in Toyonaka, the area where he resided. In fact his involvements were so broad in scope that MB Mission Administrator J. B. Toews advised him to resign from his administrative and pastoral assignments in order to focus on his teaching responsibilities, which were heavy because he was the only Japanese teacher in the missionary-dominated schools where he taught.

On January 13, 1967 MB Mission Administrator J. H. Epp wrote a letter to Rev. Kitano in which he thanked him for his many years of positive contributions to the work of the MB mission in Japan. He had brought "stability" to the young MB church, Rev. Epp wrote, and he had served as a "father to the young and inexperienced mission workers. With all of their failures and mistakes, God has led souls to a saving knowledge of Christ and the church of Christ is being built."

## COMPLICATIONS AND CONFLICTS

Rev. Kitano clearly made many important positive contributions to the work of both the MB mission in Japan and the JMBC, but misunderstandings and mistrust developed over time and open confrontations and conflicts were the result. The first note of mistrust that I have found in the mission archives was in a letter from Harry Friesen to J. B. Toews in December, 1960, while Rev. Kitano was still visiting

MB churches in North America. Certain irregularities related to the financing and registration of the Kitano residence had come to light, Harry Friesen reported. This new information made it clear to Harry Friesen that Rev. Kitano could no longer be trusted with financial and legal matters. In the future it would be necessary to rely on the services of attorneys and other professionals. A few weeks later, Harry Friesen reported to J. B. Toews that the issues had been resolved.

By around this time (1960), criticisms of the missionaries were implicit in Rev. Kitano's analyses of conditions in the churches and in his suggestions for improvements: Sermons, worship services, Sunday School class sessions for children, and other meetings (e.g. *fujinkai*, women's meetings) were too long. Sermons were not only too long, but they were often "more like law and less like gospel." The missionaries were correct in wanting members to be actively involved in the work of the church but sometimes they expected too much, too soon. The people were suffering, Rev. Kitano said, and they were in need of "warmhearted consolation and kindhearted encouragement." Many new people left the church because they were burdened with the "heavy duty of works" instead.

He accused the missionaries of rejecting any criticism of leaders in the church as "sin." Of course there are both constructive and destructive ways of offering criticisms, he said. Positive criticisms are necessary for making improvements in one's ministries and in the church. Rev. Kitano commended the missionaries for their enthusiasm and sincerity, but "I think some of them are too earnest and too sincere to re-examine their opinion and the way in their pastoral work." They were incapable of any self-criticism, he said.

By 1966, Rev. Kitano's implicit criticisms had become explicit and openly confrontational in what was surely one of the most painful and difficult episodes in the history of the MBs in Japan. His "retirement" (or "dismissal") from the cooperative Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS) was the immediate occasion for what became a long period of mutual accusations and recriminations.

I will discuss OBS in more detail later, but, briefly, it was a joint venture between the North American (German) Baptist (NAB), Baptist General Conference (Swedish) (BGC), and Mennonite Brethren missions in Japan. The cooperative

arrangement was administratively complicated because so many entities had a “stake” in the institution, but the arrangement lasted for eleven years, from 1961 to 1973. During all of that time, Rev. Kitano was the only full-time faculty member who was Japanese. The school was heavily dominated by missionaries on the “field” and by the three North American mission boards to which the missionaries were accountable. Of course the three Japanese denominations also had a keen interest in what happened in the seminary, since that was the source of pastors for their congregations.

During all of those years, Rev. Kitano was not only teaching full-time at OBS (with a teaching load that was twice as heavy as the other members of the faculty, he said) and serving as its dean, but he was also heavily involved in other responsibilities, including serving as chairman of the JMBC for six years, filling in as interim pastor when needed, conducting evangelistic campaigns, speaking at camp, and, as I mentioned earlier, helping with legal and financial matters on behalf of both the MB mission and the JMBC.

In December, 1966, the Board of OBS decided that Rev. Kitano should retire from his teaching responsibilities. MB missionary Jonathan Bartel, who was serving as president of OBS at that time, informed Rev. Kitano of this decision on January 4, 1967. It was because of his age and the condition of his health, Jonathan Bartel said. On January 15, 1967 Rev. Kitano and his wife met with President Bartel to explain that Rev. Kitano was 67 years old but he was still in good health. He was almost never absent from his classes. Each day he studied for four hours before breakfast, beginning at 4 a.m., to prepare for his classes. The Kitano's asked for a fuller explanation and they asked about the policies of OBS that guided decisions about retirement, but they received no responses that were satisfactory to them. On April 1, 1967, during the OBS graduation ceremony President Bartel announced publically that Rev. Kitano was retiring from the school. The Kitano's said that they were surprised by this announcement.

Several exchanges of letters followed, but by June, 1967, Rev. Kitano had received no responses that were satisfactory to him, so he resorted to the drastic measure of writing a ten page, handwritten letter on oversized (14.5” X 9”) paper. He mailed 17 copies of his letter to MB Mission Administrator, J. H. Epp, to be forwarded to each member of the MB Board of Foreign Missions. The letter is



dated June 15, 1967 but Rev. Kitano sent the package of letters by surface mail so they did not arrive in the mission office in Kansas until August. His letter makes it clear that Kitano-sensei was hurt, grieved and angry.

His attack against the missionaries was relentless. I will list some of the terms that he used in his long letter to describe the attitudes and behaviors of the missionaries. Some of these terms are used repeatedly in his letter and they also appear in other attacks on the missionaries “and their followers”: selfish, willful, cruel, hasty, thoughtless, indifferent, coldhearted, lawless, violent, arbitrary, deceitful, libel, defamation of character, malicious, mean, jealous, hatred, harsh, power, one-sided, rude, clever, terrible lie, hypocritical. He directed his attack specifically at three of the senior MB missionaries: Harry Friesen, Jonathan Bartel, and Roland Wiens, but others are mentioned, also.

He does not provide many details, but he does describe some of the specific issues that had troubled him over the entire eighteen year period of his service with the MBs. I will summarize, very briefly, some of these issues, in the order in which they appear in his letter.

1. First, he reviews the beginning of his work with the MB mission in 1955, when there were only three MB churches with a total average attendance of around 100. He worked very hard preaching in tent evangelistic campaigns almost nightly for six months. The Lord blessed by adding three more churches to the conference. But already in those early years he was aware of “jealousy” on the part of some of the missionaries, some of whom treated him as a “man-servant” and nothing more than an employee of the mission. The missionaries also “demanded” that Rev. Kitano take care of the “troublesome” process of dealing with financial matters related to the ownership of properties and legal registration of the mission, the Japanese MB Conference, and the growing number of local congregations. “As for myself, I worked day and night only for the sake of our Lord and His Church, but our missionaries did not hesitate to drive me hard as their own employee.”

2. He stated that for many years the missionaries refused to recognize his status as an ordained (by the Methodist church) minister. He was treated as no more than a “mission worker.” But he was greatly encouraged by an official “field visit” by mission administrator J. B. Toews in 1957 when agreements were made for

more adequate financial support for the Kitano family. But the missionaries, he said, refused to comply with these agreements for many months. He was too busy to take a second job to supplement the family income, so he resorted to visiting pawn shops to obtain funds to support his family. His wife could not afford to visit a medical doctor when she became ill. Three of the Japanese brethren, he said, provided the family with 1000 yen each month to help them live. He reported that one of the missionaries explained to Rev. Kitano that since the missionaries were foreign residents in Japan, they were required by Japanese law to have adequate financial support, so that is why they received a regular monthly income, but Rev. Kitano should be willing to have faith that God would provide. When he did receive funds from the mission, he said that he was required to visit the mission treasurer, "like a beggar." "It was not until the Osaka Biblical Seminary started three years ago that I was treated with the reasonable allowance as its full time teacher." (4)

3. From the time the JMBC was formed in 1957 with Rev. Kitano elected as its chairman, he reported constant criticism from the missionaries for being proud, haughty, bigoted, obstinate, and making himself "righteous before God and men." When he was selected to represent the JMBC in the MB Centennial celebration in North America in 1960, he was not sure that he wanted to do this. He did not make his final decision until two days before his departure from Kobe.

4. Another troublesome issue that persisted over a period of years involved disputes over the planting of a new MB congregation in Toyonaka where the Kitano family resided. According to Rev. Kitano, the JMBC decided in 1959 to plant a new MB church in Toyonaka with Rev. Kitano in charge, but the "willful," "lawless" missionaries disregarded this decision and "violently" forbade him from carrying out this plan. In fact, they denied that the decision had ever been made by the JMBC. When one of the MB pastors tried to resist the missionaries "arbitrary" and "deceitful" attempt to exercise "absolute power," one of the missionaries shouted in a "hysterical voice," "We missionaries gave birth to you and brought you up, and you are now so disobedient against us. What shall we do?"

5. A fifth specific charge against the missionaries involved an attempt to avoid paying the required tax on a residence by registering the building as a dormitory

for seminary students rather than a family residence. When the initial request for this exemption was denied, Rev. Kitano was “pressed” by a missionary to take care of the matter as soon as possible, so he requested the help of a Christian friend and the required certificate was finally “narrowly” granted by the Osaka Prefectural Office. “To my great astonishment, in a few days the reconstruction work to make the house suitable to a missionary’s residence was set about!”

Near the end of his long letter, Kitano-sensei returned to the complicated matter of his ministerial status. He had met with four of the MB missionaries on October 3, 1966 and had been informed by Rev. Krause that the MB mission had never denied the validity of his ordination. But some of the missionaries continued to reject his status as an ordained minister on the grounds that he was not a member of a local MB congregation. He had not become a member of a specific congregation in the early years because he was serving the JMBC as a whole. When he began the church-planting project in Toyonaka, he became a member of that congregation, but when the Toyonaka project was closed, he was again without membership in a local congregation. In his letter, Rev. Kitano makes continued cooperation with the MBs in Japan contingent on acceptance of his status as an ordained minister. He was more than simply a “mission worker.”

But his greatest grievance and the immediate occasion for his long letter to the members of the MB Board of Foreign Missions involved his “forced” retirement from OBS. He raised many questions about the legitimacy of his termination. Not only was the process outside of the provisions of Japanese law, but it was not consistent with the organizing principles of the seminary itself. He was not simply hired directly by OBS, he claimed, but he was sent by the JMBC as their representative, so it was not legitimate for OBS to terminate him without the consent of the JMBC. He wanted to appeal to the JMBC and he wanted to bring his case to the faculty of OBS, but he was not permitted to take either of these steps.

On February 14, 1967, NAB missionary Fred Moore, the new OBS President, visited Rev. Kitano to inform him that “I should sever myself from all affairs of the school.” When he asked for a reason for his dismissal, the president said that it was because he had criticized the missionaries in his classes in front of the students. But he made this charge without any “positive proof.”

In the light of all of this (and much more), Rev. Kitano offered the MB Board of Foreign Missions four options: (1) Restore him to full-time status at OBS; (2) If that was not possible, “rebuild” the church in Toyonaka with financial support and an adequate salary for Rev. Kitano; (3) If that was not possible, provide Rev. Kitano with financial support to do evangelism and church planting in another location in Japan; If none of these options was possible, he would (4) like to “work for the salvation of the lost Japanese people living in America” as an MB worker. And then: ““If you will not accept one of these four petitions, I shall bring my case before our Conference in Japan. And if our Conference will not listen to me I shall bring my case before our National Court of Justice.” (10)

Rev. Kitano concludes with a final attack on the three missionaries that are the primary target of his wrath for thinking that they are always “just and unblamable” while the Japanese Christians who oppose them are always “unjust and blamable.” Missionaries like this deserve the criticism that Kanzou Uchimura made against all missionaries, though Kitano-sensei himself still welcomed missionaries who are “of noble character and faithfulness for our Lord’s work.”

In his conclusion Rev. Kitano repeats the request that he had made over a period of many years. His request reflects both an implicit criticism of the MB missionaries on the field and his own Methodist-inspired confidence in a hierarchical form of church governance. He was asking for something like a bishop.

Finally I would like to repeat my long-cherished desire—would you please send one leader who is well-qualified, who has strong leadership to Japan for three years at least. I think Japan needs such a leader and Japan deserves to be given such a leader. I think he doesn’t need to learn Japanese language because he will be able to promote the work for our Lord and His church without learning this difficult Japanese language.

The End

Responses to Rev. Kitano’s long letter reveal the convoluted nature of the organizational structures of the various groups that were involved in OBS. I will say more about the organization at OBS later, but the central issue involved his relationship with OBS, which was governed on the field by a board that consisted of six missionaries representing three mission boards. The board appointed a

president of the seminary, who happened to be MB missionary Jonathan Bartel and, later, Fred Moore (NAB). Jonathan, like the other missionaries on the board, was under the direction of his mission board in North America. When Rev. Kitano received no satisfactory response from the president of OBS, he met with a small group of other MB missionaries in Japan. When he was not satisfied with their response either, he wanted to appeal to the seminary faculty and to the JMBC that he represented as a member of the seminary faculty, but when those options were closed to him, he resorted to making his long and angry appeal to the MB Board of Foreign Missions in Kansas.

I expected that there might be letters of response in the files of the missionaries who were named by Rev. Kitano, but I could find no such responses in the files that were available to me. The minutes of the September 30, 1967 meeting of the MB Missionary Fellowship simply noted that Rev. Kitano had been invited to meet with the Executive Committee and pastors of the JMBC on October 6, 1967. It was not really the responsibility of the MB missionaries on the field, nor the pastors of the JMBC to respond to Rev. Kitano's letter because it was not addressed to them. A response from the MB Board of Foreign Missions was required, however, since a copy of the letter was sent to each individual member of the board.

A letter from mission administrator J. H. Epp to Rev. Kitano dated September 14, 1967 summarizes the response of the mission board. First, the issues raised by Rev. Kitano "took place in Japan which is far removed from us" so it was impossible for the board in North America to understand and respond to the details of what happened in Japan. "The Board is also not in a position to speak for the national conference." Neither can the board speak for the board and administration of OBS since they are responsible for the administration of the school, including the hiring and termination of faculty. And, of course, the board cannot address problems related to membership in a local MB congregation in Japan. But Rev. Epp indicated that he was writing about the matter to the MB Missionary Fellowship in Japan; to the chairman of the national MB Conference (JMBC); and to the MB representative on the OBS Board "telling them of your problem and your request. I trust that you will be able to get together to discuss your grievances and to work out a solution that will be satisfactory to all." Rev. Epp also cites the official resolution of the Board that was passed in response to Rev. Kitano's letter:

Members of the Board have prayerfully considered the letter that was sent to them by Rev. Kyoichi Kitano of Japan.

The Board is grateful to God for giving to our early work in Japan the ministry of Brother Kitano. We also express our deep appreciation for the sacrificial ministry of Brother Kitano during these years in the areas of evangelism and Bible teaching.

Since this is the Lord's work we know that God will richly reward our brother for his ministries that have been done in the name of Christ.

We regret where our missionaries have not always exhibited the full spirit of Christ in their relations to Brother Kitano. It is our prayer that both our missionaries as well as Brother Kitano will, by the grace of God, remove all personal grievances and forgive each other even as God, for Christ's sake has forgiven us.

Since the basic requests of Brother Kitano relate to his assignment on the field of Japan, we believe that the solution of this problem rests with Brother Kitano and the M. B. Conference of Japan. This Board, therefore, would ask Brother Kitano and the Local Conference as missionaries to get together and in the spirit of Christ resolve these problems.

It is hard to understand how the same events could be perceived and evaluated as differently as what Rev. Kitano wrote to the MB Board of Foreign Missions and what the six missionary members of the OBS Board of Directors reported in the minutes of their meetings. What Rev. Kitano reported as "grievances" the Board viewed as a fair and business-like process that was sensitive to the needs of Rev. Kitano and his family. Of course we cannot know what words were exchanged verbally, nor can we know the tone in which these words were spoken, but I will briefly review what the minute records of the OBS board report.

The first reference to Rev. Kitano that I have found in the minutes of the OBS board are from November 2, 1965 when it was noted that "Mr. Kitano's physical powers are declining and that his teaching responsibilities are sometimes especially burdensome to him." President Bartel was instructed to discuss with Rev. Kitano the possibility of a reduced teaching load in the new academic year beginning April 1, 1966 with retirement and a part-time teaching assignment beginning the following year, April, 1967. The minutes of the next meeting of the

board (January 11, 1966) report that Jonathan Bartel had explained OBS retirement policies to Rev. Kitano and that part-time teaching opportunities would be available to him after retirement. The minutes of the February 8, 1966 meeting of the board report that the retirement plan was agreeable to him and that he had committed himself to teach during the next term.

A long note in the March 15, 1966 minutes of the OBS Board indicate that all was not entirely well. Rev. Kitano was present for part of the meeting.

Although it was believed that Mr. Kitano had understood his retirement, his attitude at the school seemed to be adversely effected. Subsequent conferences revealed that there was some misunderstanding. He had come to feel that he was being discharged from the ranks of the ministry and that his ordination was invalidated. This was partly because of a misunderstanding of the meaning of a Japanese word and partly that his conference had suggested only a year ago that he give his full energies to the school; then this year it was suggested that he retire. Mr. Kitano had only minor questions regarding the financial arrangements of his retirement... He also understands that health and age are the reasons for his retirement... he was assured that the school still desires his whole hearted assistance at a work load that will not cause undue strain.

It was agreed that Rev. Kitano would be responsible for only his teaching assignment and not for other responsibilities at the school. He wanted to focus his energies on Old Testament studies, he said. It was recognized that the financial arrangements for his retirement would have to be shared with the MB mission and conference since he had spent part of his working career with them. During this March 1966 meeting, the OBS Board adopted the following six-point resolution:

- 1) that Mr. Kitano be appointed Professor Emeritus and retirement settlement be made effective April 1, 1966; 2) that he receive on April 1, 1966 severance payment including an amount equal to five months of salary at the April 1, 1966 salary rate; 3) that he receive full pay and regular bonus at the newly adjusted rate from April 1966 through September 1966; 4) that he receive two-thirds pay at the above rate from October 1966 through March 1967; 5) that he not be required to assume responsibilities other than teaching hours, those teaching hours not to exceed eight

beginning Sept. 1966; 6) that he be publically introduced as Professor Emeritus and retired from full teaching responsibilities at or in connection with the graduation exercises.

The April 19, 1966 minutes reported that an April 1966 formal agreement had been signed by the president and Mr. Kitano and an official document of his new status and appreciation for his services had been presented to him during the graduation ceremonies.

But subsequent minutes from Board meetings during the summer and fall of 1966 and early winter of 1967 report that misunderstandings and disagreements about his retirement persisted. Problems in relationships between Rev. Kitano and the Japan MB Conference became an issue, since his position at OBS was partially, at least, as a representative of the JMBC. So his continued employment at OBS was contingent on a restoration of good relationships between him and the JMBC. Minutes from the February 14, 1967 meeting of the OBS Board report that the president was advised by the board not to continue hiring Rev. Kitano part time for the coming term (1967) because positive relationships between him and the JMBC had not yet been restored. Details of the relationship between Rev. Kitano and the JMBC are not available to me, but his continued service at OBS during the next several years indicates that some degree of reconciliation had been achieved. His long personal letter to the individual members of the MB Board of Missions in North America was sent during June 1967. As far as I can tell, the OBS Board did not respond to this letter, probably because it was not addressed to them.

Responsibility for devising practical solutions to the grievances raised by Rev. Kitano finally rested on Rev. Masaru Arita, who was the Secretary of the Japan Mennonite Brethren Conference at that time. He was also the pastor of the Ishibashi MB Church and was a part-time member of the faculty of the seminary. In a hand-written seven page letter dated September 11, 1967 Rev. Arita reported to Rev. Epp that on September 6 the pastors of the JMBC had met to discuss the situation and they were scheduled to meet with Rev. Kitano on October 4.

Rev. Arita reported that he understood the nature of the problems between Rev. Kitano and the missionaries because he knew both sides well. He cites three reasons for the problems.



1. "Deficiency of mutual understandings due to the difficulty of languages and the differences of habits and customs." When Rev. Kitano joined the MBs, Rev. Arita wrote, he expected that he would be paid by the missionaries. When that did not happen, life became very difficult for the Kitanos. One misunderstanding led to another.
2. "Deficiency of moral character between them." Both parties insisted on their own way and refused to listen to the other side. "I have seen the missionaries' cunning and craftiness. I have also seen Mr. Kitano's shrewdness and stubbornness." The reason for Rev. Kitano's anger was the lack of consistency between the words and deeds of the missionaries, who "sometimes say this and sometimes say that so that we are often perplexed and come to distrust them."
3. "Deficiency of thoughtfulness." The missionaries and Rev. Kitano should have thought more carefully about their relationship and should have stated their working arrangements "in writing" (underlining is Rev. Arita's) but they failed to do so.

Rev. Arita also responded to a series of questions that had been posed by Rev. Epp.

1. Relationships between the missionaries and the JMBC were not so bad. Japanese pastors sometimes opposed what the missionaries were doing, but things could usually be worked out satisfactorily. It was Rev. Arita's opinion that the mission and the JMBC should be separate organizations. The JMBC would never achieve spiritual and economic autonomy if the two parties remained together, he said, and current arrangements resulted in a lot of unnecessary work and fatigue.
2. As to relationships between individual missionaries and Japanese national workers, "You do not need to worry about that at all at present." With the exception of Rev. Kitano and one other case, "there is no enmity between them."
3. Concerning the specific problems involving Rev. Kitano: He deserves thanks for his many contributions to the work of the JMBC and OBS, "but it is also true that he is a troublemaker" who has caused many people to stumble. Since other groups are involved in the governance of OBS, changing decisions is not easy once they have been made by the Board.

4. Concerning specific solutions to the problems with Rev. Kitano, Rev. Arita was sorry that he had little to offer except to say that he had tried very hard to find a satisfactory solution, meeting with many groups and individuals, including Rev. Kitano who resisted any interference in his personal affairs, especially by laymen and pastors who had only been licensed and were not fully ordained ministers as Rev. Kitano himself was. Rev. Arita was of the opinion that Rev. Kitano should not return to the MB Conference and that it might be necessary to pay him some "consolation money." He did not think a Japanese court would be interested in Rev. Kitano's situation. Finally, "Please pray for us." he said.

It is clear that Rev. Kitano's problems were not just with the missionaries. Rev. Arita not only thought that Rev. Kitano should not be permitted to return to the MB Conference, but he also reported to J. H. Epp that the previous year Rev. Kitano had requested membership in the Ishibashi MB church but his request had been rejected by the church because of deficiencies in his moral character.

I have not located copies of any official agreements nor have I found a report that details the settlements that were finally negotiated by Rev. Arita but the basic elements are clear from the correspondence. Relationships between Rev. Kitano and the JMBC were sufficiently reconciled that he could continue to teach part time as OBS Faculty Emeritus until the dissolution of the school. The Kitano family was given full ownership of the house in which they resided even though they had completed only about one half of the payments on the property. Unfortunately, I have seen no reports of reconciliation between Rev. Kitano and the MB missionaries in Japan, nor do I have information about relationships between him and his family and the JMBC after his full retirement. I do not know where, or if, he was accepted as a member of a local congregation in his old age nor do I know the date of his death and the location of his funeral. Perhaps this and other information about him is available in Japan.

The last item in Rev. Kitano's folder in the archival records is a letter from J. H. Epp dated June 11, 1968. The letter requests a statement from Rev. Kitano:

That the matter had been satisfactorily taken care of and that we as a mission were no longer responsible for any past grievances. We need some statement of this nature for our records. Brother Arita mentioned that he would discuss this with you.

I do not know if or how Rev. Kitano responded to this request.

In this and other similar cases of conflict, it turns out that “peace-loving Mennonites” are often not very good at resolving conflicts. It seems easier to cast accusation of “jealousy,” “stubbornness,” and “untrustworthiness” back and forth at one another, as the missionaries and Rev. Kitano did, than it is to find ways to resolve the issues. Like others in the tradition of pietism, it often seems easier to cite Bible verses and call for prayer than it is to follow some form of conflict resolution such as that which is outlined in Matthew 18. The missionaries in Japan did not seem to be able to accomplish this and the administrators in Kansas did not know what to do, either. Fortunately, Rev. Arita was available to achieve at least some measure of success in resolving issues that were not only “spiritual,” but they were also, in part at least, organizational and procedural. Christian gospel and earthen vessels were thoroughly mixed together on both sides: missionary and Japanese.

#### 10. BELIEVING TOGETHER: SOURCES OF JAPAN MENNONITE BRETHERN CONFERENCE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

One of the decisions that was made during the early MB missionaries’ planning session at the Nosegawa Campsite in the autumn of 1955 was to prepare a “Handbook” for members that would include a Confession of Faith (COF) and some other basic information about the MB church. As I reported in Part One, at that time there were several versions of MB Confessions of Faith from which to choose. The official MB COF during the 1950s was the Confession that had been adopted by the MB General Conference in 1902. This old COF was very long. Many of the articles consisted mostly of a compilation of biblical phrases and texts. There were several shorter MB COFs that were included in the legal constitutions of the various MB conferences in Canada and the U.S. As J. B. Toews pointed out (below), none of these MB COFs was explicitly dispensational or even pre-millennial. I do not know how this happened, but the COF that appears in the JMBC “Handbooks” to which I have access (dated September 23, 1970 and September 15, 1974) is an almost direct translation of the COFs that are included in the constitutions of the Pacific District (1951) and U. S. National MB (1957) conferences.

I have seen several references to a JMBC statement of beliefs that was clearly dispensational, but I have not been able to locate such a document in the mission archives. The JMBC COF that is in the mission archives mentions the millennium but, like other MB COFs, it is not explicitly pre-millennial or dispensational. Neither the rapture nor the tribulation are mentioned.

Nevertheless, in a letter that Harry Friesen sent to mission executive director J. H. Epp on September 29, 1970, Dr. Friesen made the case that dispensationalism was indeed a central part of MB theological identity. The purpose of his long letter was to explain why the JMBC had decided not to participate in the Osaka Biblical Seminary. As we will see in the next section, the commitment of the JMBC to dispensational theology was a major part of the rationale for their decision not to participate. Harry Friesen tried to make the case that the dispensationalism written into the JMBC statement was entirely consistent with the theological position of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference in North America. The JMBC COF, he wrote, was based on official North American COFs "supplemented" and "enlarged upon" by other materials that were sent to him by former MB Mission Administrator, A. E. Janzen.

In his September 1970 letter, Harry Friesen reviewed the origins of the COF of the JMBC and justified its identification with the dispensational eschatology espoused by Rev. H. H. Janzen and others.

The Japan Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith was drawn up on the basis of official North American Mennonite Brethren Conference statements which have *enlarged upon* (emphasis mine) the Confession of Faith where the belief in the rapture (underlines by Harry Friesen) of the church and its distinction from Israel has been clearly spelled out ... Whether one uses the word dispensational or not, the fact remains that such distinctions do not come from imposing a dispensational interpretation upon Scripture but rather come out of the hermeneutical principle of following a principle of literal interpretation which, if carried out consistently will also lead to a distinction between Israel and the church and logically leads to making distinctions in God's dealing with mankind from time to time. The number of such dispensations is not crucial. The point I am making here is that this distinction of Christ coming for his saints

and with his saints has long been officially held in North America. The Japan Confession of faith is based on the official Confession of Faith and the printed enlargements of definitions relating to eschatology.

His letter also made it clear that Harry Friesen was quite aware that things were diverse and changing in the MB world in North America. “Now it cannot be denied that in North America there is a trend away from this position by some M. B. pastors and teachers who have been influenced by literature or received theological education in schools holding eschatological positions contrary to interpretations generally held by the M.B. Conference.” But, he said, the JMBC should not be expected to change its theological position just because of developments in North America. “They have in all good faith adopted the normal M.B. doctrinal position and are convinced of the Scriptural validity of it and though they too are subjected to all sorts of pressures they are thoroughly convinced that this position is closer to Scripture than other interpretations.”

Maintaining theological unity was more important in Japan than in North America, Harry Friesen said, because that is the only foundation upon which conference unity can be built.

In America and Canada it cannot be denied that the similarity of culture and the very fact that so many are born “Mennonite” tends to give a cohesion which is not necessarily based on doctrinal unity but similarity of background, relationships, tradition and *zwiebacks*, etc. In Japan the only cohesive force would have to be found in doctrinal unity because there are no Mennonite cultural or traditional blood lines. To subject the small M.B. Conference to all of the various theological interpretations and variations which have found lodging in the M.B. constituency in North America would turn our Japan Conference into turmoil.

As for the theological position that was adopted for inclusion in the Constitution of the Osaka Biblical Seminary (details follow), from the point of view of the MBs in Japan, there were problems from the very beginning.

The Japanese brethren are keenly aware of the pressures which were put upon the Japan M.B. missionaries when cooperation was first being worked out. Particularly it was stressed that not all M.B.’s in North America were dispensationalists—so the position of the Japan missionaries and the

Japanese brethren at that time could not clearly be stated in the OBS Confession of Faith. Then the North American Baptists through their Home Advisory Committee put pressure on to omit “pre-millennial” from the Statement of Faith because some in North America might object to such a position... Because of the broadness of the cooperation basis and the limitations and restriction placed upon spelling out areas where differences easily arise, the M.B. Conference feels that in a few more years the unity which has been so blessed of God will give way to theological controversy in the Conference.

Harry Friesen wrote his long letter as an expression of his own personal perspective, but, he said, he was confident that what he had to say was shared by most of the other MB missionaries in Japan. Of course Harry Friesen was correct in saying that things were diverse and changing among the MBs in North America. The COF of the MB General Conference was revised in 1975 after a nine year process, and, then again in 1999 after a two-year process. After dissolution of the joint Canadian-U.S. MB General Conference in 2000, the two national conferences have been free to make revisions on their own, and that has happened. Canadian MBs have accepted women as lead pastors and U.S. MBs have changed Articles 12 and 13 on relationships with the state and service in the military. And, of course, ICOMB developed the global MB COF that formed the basis for the recent revision of the JMBC COF.

As part of their celebration of their fiftieth anniversary in 2000, the JMBC identified three themes that represented their theological identity: Biblical, Evangelism, and Peace. According to Rev. Fujino, by “Biblical,” the JMBC meant a dispensational system for interpreting the Scriptures, and the approach to age-graded Christian education for children that was developed by missionary Ruth Wiens. By “Evangelism” they meant the creation and implementation of a series of three ten-year plans for planting new churches. The first two plans were remarkably successful but the third failed to produce the desired results. Evangelism also meant a commitment to send Japanese MB missionaries to other countries. The “Peace” emphasis was less clearly defined. The Japanese government had no system for conscription into the military and the “Peace Article” (IX) in the National Constitution prohibited Japan from going to war, so “conscientious objection” to military service was not an issue in Japan as it was in

North America. "In addition, MB missionaries did not emphasize peace in their teaching. Although the JMBC has proclaimed a commitment to pacifism, it has been essentially theoretical." (Fujino in Wiens, ed., p. 208)

It seems to me that this way of articulating the theological identity of the JMBC reflected the earlier position of the conference as "Evangelical but not Anabaptist." (Note R. Lee report summarized below). As the JMBC has more recently moved in a more Anabaptist direction, they have adopted a version of the ICOMB COF that includes the following five declarations: We are (1) a people of the Bible; (2) a people of a New Way; (3) a people of a Covenant Community; (4) a people of Reconciliation; and (5) a people of Hope.

Another brief three-point "Confession of Faith" appears in some Anabaptist literature and is used in several Mennonite congregations in North America (including the College Community Church, Mennonite Brethren, in Clovis, California, now the Willow Avenue Mennonite Church). This three-part declaration is derived directly from the definition of Anabaptism that was first proposed by Mennonite (MC) historian and church leader, Harold S. Bender in 1944: "Jesus is the center of our faith; community is the center of our lives; and reconciliation is the center of our work."

I will leave it to others to interpret and evaluate the recently revised JMBC Confession of Faith, the process through which it was adopted, and how it is being used in the churches. But it seems clear that beginning with the COF of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) provides the JMBC with a broader and more inclusive base than the previous COF which was a translation of a 60 year old American document that still reflected some of the old narrowness and defensiveness that had characterized the 1902 MB COF. And, as the new JMBC COF does, concluding with a statement of the implications of the ICOMB COF for the specific circumstances in the local churches and society in Japan provides the potential, at least, for the kind of dialog and mutual understandings that Delbert Wiens and many others called for.

The International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) provides one organizational response to the new social and religious situation in which the larger MB movement now finds itself. It remains to be seen whether ICOMB or any of its component communities will be up to the task of surviving the new

realities of the post-Christendom and post-modern world toward which we are all moving. What will be the function of a COF, no matter how well crafted, in a post-modern world that is increasingly post-denominational and post-ideological?

## 11. COMING TOGETHER AND COMING APART: THE BIRTH AND THE DEMISE OF THE OSAKA BIBLICAL SEMINARY

### BACKGROUND AND EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Mennonites, including the MBs, have long been committed to various forms of Christian Education (CE), so it should come as no surprise to find that CE was on the agenda when the early MB missionaries met at the Nosegawa campsite in the fall of 1955 to plan their mission strategies. In Russia and sometimes on the frontiers of Canada and the U.S. there was no alternative to building their own schools because no other schools were available, but MBs established schools of their own even when other schools were available. In many North American communities where there were concentrations of MB people, the MBs built their own Bible schools of various kinds, their own high schools and liberal arts colleges their own Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary), and various consortia arrangements for university and seminary education in Canada.

The MBs in North America were especially prolific in establishing short-term (two to four years) Bible School and Bible Institute programs. The first such MB school in the U.S. began in 1884, near Hillsboro, Kansas, just one decade after MBs began to arrive in North America from Russia. Some other examples: Four Bible Schools were built in the state of Oklahoma, but all were closed except the Corn Academy (1902), which, like the Immanuel Academy in Reedley, California, transitioned into high school programs. Another Bible School, the Pacific Bible Institute in Fresno, California, became a liberal arts college (first Pacific College, and eventually Fresno Pacific University).

In his chapter on the history of MB education, J. A Toews briefly reviews the history of no fewer than 13 Bible School and Bible Institute programs in Canada, plus five high schools, and the MB Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba. More recently, Bruce Guenther reported (in Abe Dueck, ed. p. 52) that there were more than 20 such schools in Canada (“more than any other denomination in Canada”). The first was established in 1913 and most were built during the 1930s and 1940s.



Many of these Bible Schools were very small, meeting in church facilities, with just a few students and a small faculty, many of whom were ministers who were themselves products of similar Bible schools and institutes. The curriculum was often focused around the study of the Bible as interpreted from a fundamentalist and dispensational perspective. Almost all of these Bible Schools have either closed or transitioned into high school or liberal arts college programs.

MB historian J. A. Toews and others pointed out that the MBs did not build their Bible Schools and Bible Institutes in a vacuum. They were part of a larger pattern that was closely associated with and strongly influenced by fundamentalism. The first two such schools in the U.S. were the Nyack Missionary College (1882) and the Moody Bible Institute (1886). The Bible school and Bible Institute movement reached its peak during the years 1930 through 1960, the same period of time when the MBs were building most of their own such institutions.

Bruce Guenther and others have pointed out that these MB Bible Schools and Bible Institutes served some very important purposes during the decades when they were popular. “The Bible schools were intended to serve as agents of cultural retention by grounding successive generations in the German language and the Mennonite-Anabaptist faith and way of life.” (53) But with urbanization, upward social and economic mobility and assimilation into the surrounding mainstream cultures and societies, support for Bible Institutes dwindled. In Canada, a few MB Bible Institutes remain but most MB institutions of higher learning are presently parts of consortia: Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg and Regent University in British Columbia. At least some of the MB mission “compounds” included Bible Institutes and Bible Schools.

All (or almost all) of the early MB missionaries in Japan attended at least one of these MB institutions, and some had received all (or almost all) of their education in MB schools such as these. So it is no surprise that as early as 1952 the MB missionaries were already thinking about beginning their own program of post-high school Christian education in Japan. The purposes of the school they had in mind closely resembled the kinds of institutions by which the missionaries themselves had been shaped.

As mentioned above, the first stage in the development of MB Christian education in Japan was a laymen’s training program that began in 1955. Classes

were held in the churches, with Harry Friesen and Rev. Kitano as instructors. The next stage was a Bible institute program that began in 1957 as the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute (MBBI) with classes meeting in the Kasugade MB Church, the former MCC Center. In 1959 the school was moved to the Ishibashi Church and other facilities in the healthier and more respectable neighborhood of Ishibashi. Like the Bible schools and institutes in North America, the purposes were twofold: to prepare men to serve as pastors, and to prepare laymen (and women) for service in the churches and as witnesses in society. The focus was on *men* but women students were prepared for service as Sunday school teachers for children, pianists, and as the wives of pastors. All of the full time instructors in the MB Bible Institute, with the exception of Rev. Kitano, were missionaries. Meeting in church facilities with small numbers of students (Ten students were enrolled in the spring of 1959.) to study the Bible from a fundamentalist and dispensational perspective was an entirely familiar approach to Christian education for the early MB missionaries in Japan. The other purpose that the MB Bible Institutes fulfilled in North America, the preservation of the German language and Russian Mennonite culture, was, of course, not relevant in the Japanese context. It should be noted that the Bible Institute as a form of Christian education was initiated in Japan just at the time when such institutions were going out of vogue in North America. Students and their families in Canada and the U.S. were looking for higher levels of educational sophistication and churches were asking for pastors who were better prepared theologically and culturally than what a small Bible School could provide.

The cooperative Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS) grew out of the humble beginnings of the MB Bible Institute in the Kasugade MB Church and then, beginning in 1959, in the facilities of the MB church in Ishibashi. But the process of establishing and then ending OBS as a cooperative venture was anything but simple. The story of OBS cannot be understood without a prior understanding of how the school was organized and how decisions about the school were made.

As noted above, the three missions that cooperated in the creation of the OBS were: the Baptist General Conference, or BGC (also known as “Swedish Baptists”); the North American Baptist Conference, or NAB (also known as “German Baptists”); and the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America. Each of these groups was a relatively small denomination. The

ethnicities differed, but each had its origins in an immigrant community in North America. Geographic distributions differed in both Japan and North America. Nevertheless, in spite of these and other differences, there were enough commonalities in both purposes and theology to at least attempt to cooperate in a school. Everyone involved realized that establishing a cooperative seminary would be a difficult process, but as Harry Friesen said, if we do not at least try, we will be the poorer for it.

## DECISION-MAKING AT OBS

Establishing, administering, and then dissolving a cooperative school involved many difficult challenges, partly because of the many stake-holders in the institution, each expecting their voices to be heard in the decision-making process. I will list and briefly identify the various actors and processes that were involved in making any substantive decisions related to OBS.

1. Mission Boards. Missionaries were appointed, financed, and directed by the policies and procedures of the board that sent them, so missionaries were accountable to the mission administrators who sent them and then guided and evaluated their activities. Mission administrators, in turn, were accountable to their boards for how they carried out the policies and priorities of the board. And board members represented constituencies, so the board members, too, felt responsible for making decisions that would be acceptable to (or at least would not be rejected by) the people whom they represented. Since the mission boards would be responsible for sending finances and personnel to support whatever program of Christian education was proposed by the missionaries on the field in Japan, the mission boards would have to give their approval to staffing, finances, curriculum and all other important policies and procedures.

Of course a large board with a heavy agenda (some printed agenda for MB mission board meetings were 200 pages long) and just a few meetings each year (The MB Board met two times each year.) could not give detailed direction to the creation of a new program such as OBS, so the boards of the three denominations delegated negotiating and management authority to the three chief mission administrators. These three administrators met periodically to review reports, proposals, and requests related to OBS. This group of three mission administrators was called the “Home Advisory Committee” (HAC). They were the

main channel of communication between the three groups of missionaries in Japan and the three mission boards back in North America. So no significant actions related to OBS could be taken in Japan without the approval of HAC, and ultimately the three mission boards that the HAC represented.

2. Mission Organizations on the Field. Missionaries on the field in Japan were organized with various forms of representative structures to provide leadership in administrative and fellowship activities. Missionaries were also typically organized into sub-committees. In the case of OBS, each of the three mission groups in Japan was initially represented in negotiations by their “Christian Education Committee.” Representatives of these three committees met together five (or six) times during 1959 to share early ideas about forming some kind of cooperative pastoral training program. Of course these committees could not act without the support of the mission groups in Japan that they represented, so they first reported back to their missionary colleagues and, if they received their support, then the gathering of Christian education committees could send their reports and recommendations back to the HAC and the boards in North America that they represented.

3. OBS Board of Directors. According to the Constitution and By-Laws that were eventually adopted, formal administrative responsibility for OBS rested with a Board of Directors. The Board consisted of two missionaries from each of the three mission organizations, so there were six members, plus the OBS President who was appointed by the OBS Board (with HAC approval). The president met regularly with the six members of the board. Of course all substantive decisions that were made by the Board were subject to review by the HAC and few decisions could stand without the support of their fellow missionaries in Japan, since virtually every decision had budgetary and personnel implications. The freedom of the OBS Board to make decisions was so circumscribed that at least one member of the Japanese Advisory Committee wondered if the HAC was actually running the school from North America.

4. Japanese Church Associations. Everything that I have read indicates that the goal of all (or almost all) mission organizations was to give birth to an indigenous church community that was, as the slogan went, “self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.” But evangelical churches in Japan in the late 1950s were

almost all new, small, with very limited financial resources, and young, with few mature leaders. So if there was going to be a school for the preparation of pastors, the finances and staff would have to come from mission organizations. But, still, the ideal was to invite the support and participation of the Japanese church “conferences” or “associations” as soon as was realistically possible. This meant that the missionaries also needed to test ideas and proposals with their Japanese church members before they implemented their plans. One mechanism for inviting input from the three Japanese denominational entities was the formation of an “Advisory Committee” (AC) that consisted of representatives of the three Japanese denominations. The AC met periodically to receive reports and provide counsel. The mission boards, mission administrators, and missionaries in Japan were constantly searching for ways to involve their church members in the support and administration of the school since the goal was to transition to a Japanese board of directors, faculty, administration and financial support as soon as that was realistically possible.

5. Faculty. All of the full-time teachers at OBS, with the exception of Rev. Kitano, and most of the part-time teachers were missionaries. One member of the faculty was selected by the board to serve as president and there were other administrative and staff positions. There was also an organization that included all of the full-time faculty members who met together periodically and this faculty group was sometimes expanded to include all part-time faculty. The faculty expected that their collective voice would be heard by the final decision-makers.

Needless to say, with this many voices who wanted to be heard and this many stake-holders in the school (e.g. minutes of the April 21, 1970 meeting of the OBS board were distributed to persons occupying no less than 28 separate offices), decision-making at OBS was sometimes slow, cumbersome, and opportunities for misunderstandings were legion. But, nevertheless, the process did finally produce a cooperative school. I will briefly review some of the major decisions that were made, first in the establishment of OBS and then, eleven years later, in its “dissolution.” I have made no attempt to review the entire history of the school. I have focused only on the beginning and the end.

COMING TOGETHER: ESTABLISHING A COOPERATIVE SCHOOL

I have found no record that indicates who first suggested the idea of forming a cooperative seminary, but it is easy to speculate that this might have been part of the informal conversations that happened at meetings of evangelical missionaries in Japan in the resort and conference center in Karuizawa and elsewhere. Harry Friesen and others reported that the Baptists first initiated conversations with the MBs about the possibility of establishing a cooperative seminary. The first meeting to explore possibilities for cooperation for which I have located a written record took place in Ishibashi on July 8, 1959. Representatives from five missions were present: Baptist General Conference (BGC); North American Baptist (NAB); Brethren in Christ (BIC); General Conference Mennonite (GCM); and Mennonite Brethren. In a separate report to MB Mission Administrator J. B. Toews, Harry Friesen mentioned that the MB missionaries had also been contacted by Mennonite Church (MC) missionaries about the possibility of a cooperative school, but the MBs had responded “coolly,” since “fellowship” with the other Mennonite groups in Japan was acceptable but the MBs avoided any cooperative ventures that might involve “doctrine.” The BIC, GC, MC and MB missionaries all met from time to time as part of the Japan Mennonite Missionary Fellowship, but the other Mennonite-related groups do not appear again as participants in meetings about a cooperative school.

Cooperation of any kind would be complicated by several factors besides just the cumbersome decision-making process. The various missions were working in different geographic areas in Japan. Each mission operated with different policies and priorities. There were theological differences. The three missions were all North American but they were centered in different areas of Canada and the U.S. and they reflected different ethnic heritages: Swedish, German, and Russian-Mennonite. They differed in size in both North America and Japan. They had somewhat different ideas about the kind of school they desired: Bible School, Bible Institute, Seminary, or some kind of combination of types of schools. The MBs already had a Bible School (MBBI) with its own established program and facilities in the Ishibashi Church that had been in existence for three years. All three groups envisioned the eventual establishment of a new seminary but were open to exploring a variety of other options as well. All three groups reported that they already had permission from their home boards to explore possibilities for a cooperative school.

The first item on the agenda of that first meeting (after devotions) was a review of schools in Japan that offered Bible or theological education. Harry Friesen reported that as early as 1952 the MB missionaries had intended to begin a school, so he had first explored the options that were available in Japan at that time. He listed eight schools about which he had gathered information and concluded that no evangelical school met their needs. Not much had changed by 1955, so the MBs began their own Bible Institute program in 1957. The other missions reported similar reservations about the available schools. All agreed that sending students to Tokyo to study was problematic for a variety of reasons.

Already in that first meeting the representatives of the three missions began to discuss theological differences that might be obstacles to cooperation. Approximately one third of the minutes of the July 8, 1959 meeting summarize a discussion of several theological issues that might be barriers to cooperation: foot-washing; pacifism; oaths; eschatology; baptism; and ecclesiology.

In a second meeting two months later, on September 10, 1959, each group reported that their home boards had offered encouragement to proceed with conversations about a cooperative seminary. Other items on the agenda were: various options for the kind of school they might create; where a campus might be located; which missionaries might be able to teach which subjects; and what kind of scholarship assistance each group was providing for Japanese members who were studying in preparation for serving as pastors. By the end of the second meeting, the representatives of the Education Committees of the three mission groups were ready to schedule a third meeting to take place on November 9, 1959, about two months later, again in Ishibashi. Their agenda would be a discussion of a possible curriculum for a four-year seminary program.

There were a host of issues that needed to be resolved. Students in a “seminary” are usually expected to hold bachelor degrees, at least, but most of the prospective students, and those who were already studying in the MB Bible Institute, were high school graduates, and some had progressed only as far as junior high school. What kind of school would best meet the needs of this broad range of student backgrounds and abilities? The solution seemed to be that the school should provide a two or three year Bible Institute program for students who were not university graduates *and* a three or four year seminary program for

students who were university grads. Since all of the students were from a “pagan” society, they all came to the school with minimal background familiarity with the Bible, so all of the students would study together in a first year program that focused on providing this background.

Conducting a school that provided both Bible Institute and seminary programs raised other questions. Since the curricula of both types of schools were quite similar, it seemed reasonable to have the students take many of the classes together, with students who were in the Seminary program doing more work than was required of Bible Institute students. But a serious problem of “duplication” received much attention from the missionaries in Japan and the boards and administrators back in North America. Since acceptable evangelical textbooks and other printed materials were in short supply in Japan, students could easily end up receiving the same lectures and reading the same materials in more than one course. It is not entirely clear how this matter was resolved, but the lack of materials and the scarcity of qualified teachers who held acceptable evangelical convictions were cited as proof that a school like OBS was needed. Some of the graduates could be expected to go on to higher levels of education in Japan and abroad and could be counted on to swell the ranks of evangelical scholars who would teach and write at the required level of academic and theological sophistication.

One of the other issues that required negotiation was the appropriate balance between “academic freedom” and “indoctrination.” A consensus seemed to emerge that “indoctrination” was appropriate for all students in the beginning stages of their education and for Bible Institute students throughout their course of study, but that more open freedom of inquiry would be appropriate for seminary students who had developed strong enough convictions concerning the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith. The MBs, it appears, were more eager than the other groups to make sure that students were well “indoctrinated” before freedom of inquiry was permitted. This, of course, raised tensions for faculty who could not be quite sure what they were and were not permitted to teach in their classrooms.

Questions about facilities and finances also needed to be answered. Location and buildings were not immediate issues since the MB Bible Institute was already



meeting in the Ishibashi Church, and, when that space was no longer adequate, the large MB mission residence in Ishibashi served as an acceptable temporary home for the school. Nearby residences were used for dormitories and, while it was available, the clubhouse in the Ishibashi neighborhood served as dining hall and dormitory. Locating the school on the MB Nosegawa campsite was considered for a time but there were problems with the remoteness of the location and public transportation was inconvenient.

Land for more appropriate buildings with adequate space for a school was purchased in 1962, even before negotiations concerning the nature and organization of the school were complete. The new site was near the Ishibashi Church, but the OBS Board soon had second thoughts about the location when it was learned that runways in the Osaka International Airport in nearby Itami were being extended to accommodate large jet airplanes and Ishibashi would be in the flight path. Perhaps the noise would be disruptive, it was feared, so alternative locations were considered. A site along the Hankyu rail line between Osaka and Kobe would be ideal, it was thought, because that would make travel between home and the Canadian Academy in Kobe more convenient for the children of missionary teachers at OBS. A group of missionaries visited a lovely possible site on the mountainside above Mikage, overlooking the Bay, but the OBS Board finally decided to build their facilities on the Ishibashi plot that they already owned. If the large national Osaka University in Ishibashi could tolerate the noise made by large jet aircraft, so could OBS. It was decided early on that the cost of land and buildings would be shared equally by the three missions, so each mission eventually contributed one third of the cost of the new land and buildings for the OBS campus.

Each cooperating mission was expected to provide the equivalent of approximately two full-time missionary teachers. Some of the missionary teachers began to teach even before cooperative documents were finalized. BGC missionary Jim Paterson began to teach as early as October, 1960. NAB missionary Florence Miller wrote in her autobiography that she taught for 13 years, so she, too, began her teaching career at OBS before all of the arrangements were finalized.

It was decided early on that not all operating expenses should be shared equally since some missions would have more students in the school than other missions. The formula that was finally agreed to was that one half of the operating expenses would be shared equally and the other one half of operating expenses would be shared in the same ratio as the number of students from each of the three missions who were enrolled in the school. Students from church groups outside of the three cooperating missions were not included in these calculations.

There were a host of other arrangements that needed to be negotiated. A persistently troublesome matter was coordinating missionary furloughs. Each mission had its own policies and schedules for missionaries to return periodically to their homeland for rest and recuperation; for reconnecting with their families, friends, supporting congregations, and culture; for study; and for fundraising. The problem was that furlough policies and schedules were not necessarily coordinated with the other missions or with the Japanese academic calendar, so the OBS Board was constantly negotiating with missionary teachers and their home Boards about furlough schedules. The ratio and role of women missionary teachers in the school also required coordination. Mission boards were requested to take into account the number of women missionaries that they sent to Japan so that there would not be too many, nor too few, women teachers in the school.

These and other practical matters were resolved to the satisfaction of the various stake-holders. OBS began to hold classes in the spring of 1960 on a temporary basis while details of cooperation could be negotiated. The BGC did not make their final commitment to full participation until the spring of 1964.

#### THEOLOGY AT THE OSAKAS BIBLICAL SEMINARY: ADOPTING A STATEMENT OF FAITH

Discussions about theological differences and similarities occupied significant portions of the agenda in the earliest meetings to discuss the possibility of a cooperative school. During the first meeting, the GC Mennonite representative reported that the GC Mennonites in North America were more “liberal” than the other Mennonite groups, but up to that time none of the GC missionaries in Japan were “liberal.” I did not notice any other references to liberal theology being an issue at OBS. None of the three groups that were cooperating in the establishment of the new school in Japan could be suspected of being “liberal.”

There were a series of “minor” issues that were unique to the MB church, such as footwashing, not swearing oaths, and not belonging to “secret societies” that needed to be addressed, but none of these issues proved to be barriers to cooperation. In fact, they were not included in the JMBC COF, probably because they had little relevance in the Japanese social and cultural context. The two theological issues that did require special attention were the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite position on pacifism (or “non-resistance”) and the place of dispensationalism in MB theological identity. Clarification of potentially divisive topics such as these could only be done by persons who could speak with authority on behalf of their denominations, so, during the second meeting of the HAC in Chicago on November 27, 1959, MB Mission Administrator, J. B. Toews presented two written statements on these issues to his two Baptist fellow administrators. Rev. Toews indicated that these statements represented the position of the MB Board of Foreign Missions, so they accurately reflected official MB positions on these matters.

First, concerning the MB position on pacifism, “Reporter” NAB mission administrator R. Schilke summarized: “Rev. J. B. Toews made it clear that on the mission fields the M.B. Church has not considered the doctrine of pacifism as basic.” Following are excerpts from Rev. Toews’ four paragraph statement:

It (pacifism) is taught as a principle of the Christian life, the expression of which may vary under different circumstances and according to the understanding of the individual believer... The MB Board of Foreign Missions has not viewed the principle of non-resistance as a doctrine to be singled out for a special emphasis but rather considered it a part of the total Christian relationship of the believer towards his fellow-men and his government... The Mennonite Brethren Church, as a member of the Mennonite Central Committee has not shared with the other Mennonite groups of the M.C.C. the special peace emphasis to be carried out as a message to the world, neither has it shared the cooperative endeavor with other pacifistic movements... Christian non-resistance as a Biblical principle finds its application only to the relationship of an individual believer to his circumstances and fellow men and cannot be applied to a world idealism which eventually is to result in the abolition of war.

In his final paragraph, Rev. Toews assured his Baptist brethren that “The M. B. Conference does not hold any unkind or critical position against other evangelical groups who many not share with them the expressed position of biblical non-resistance (and) accept responsibilities of participation in destructive warfare.”

This MB approach to the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite “peace witness” as articulated by J. B. Toews has several implications. First, it devalues what were once core Mennonite convictions that peace-making, reconciliation and non-participation in warfare are central to the Christian life and redefines them as merely secondary matters that are of marginal, not basic, importance. It redefines decisions about participation in war, and peace-making more generally, from matters to be discerned together by a disciplined community and leaves them to the discretion of the individual believer. It distances the MBs from the “peace witness” of the MCC and the community of “historic peace churches” and aligns the MBs more closely with evangelicals and fundamentalists who are almost universally inclined toward an uncritical patriotism (“American civil religion”). But this way of thinking about the historic Anabaptist commitment to peace and non-resistance did reflect the thinking of many MBs in North America and it opened the door for MBs to cooperate with other evangelical bodies, including the two Baptist groups with which they cooperated in founding OBS.

Rev. Toews’ statement “On Dispensationalism” was shorter and it clearly placed the MB denomination outside the dispensational camp. His statement reads, in full:

The Mennonite Brethren Church is not a part of the ultra-dispensationalism segment of evangelical theology but has throughout its history been conservative in its doctrinal expression in the area of Eschatology. The M. B. Confession of Faith contains a statement of belief in the second coming of Christ and has historically held to a pre-millennial position. No dogmatism of dispensational division of scriptures and eras of time, however, have been accepted by the M. B. Church throughout its history. Few individual men of the Conference have been more dogmatic and leaned to dispensational interpretation of scripture. This, however, has never been an official position of the Church.

When the Baptist and MB missionaries in Japan prepared their first draft of a Constitution for OBS in February 1962, they included the term “pre-millennial” in the article on eschatology in the statement of faith that would define the theological foundation on which the institution would be built. Their draft of the article was as follows:

We believe in the personal, visible and premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous, and the endless suffering of the wicked.

But the three mission administrator members of the Home Advisory Committee (HAC) crossed out the word “premillennial” in the draft and asked the missionaries to remove it from the proposed statement. In a letter dated May 3, 1963 the HAC explained the reason for this change. The letter and explanation were in response to a request from the missionaries in Japan for “clarification” of why the members of HAC wanted the word “premillennial” removed from the Constitution.

The representatives of the three missions present point out that in none of the statements of faith of the represented denominations the specification of premillennial return is adopted. It is known that generally the three denominations hold to a premillennial position, however to specify this particular aspect in a constitution appears inadvisable in the light of the expressed position of the statements of faith of the larger bodies involved.

So neither MB pacifism nor dispensationalism (or even premillennialism) stood in the way of cooperation in the founding of OBS. The necessary agreements and documents were completed and temporary arrangements became permanent in March, 1964.

As I said, I have made no attempt to trace the history of OBS during the eleven years of its existence. But I will mention just a few of the many ways in which the school prospered. As early as the spring of 1962 two of the mission boards (NAB and MB) approved the purchase of property for the school near the Ishibashi Church. The two boards were willing to make this investment even before the documents defining the terms of cooperation were complete and before the BGC was able to fully commit to cooperation. The construction of two new buildings

was completed in March, 1967 and September, 1968. By the summer of 1965, the OBS Board reported that they expected 35 students to enroll in the spring, 20 men and 15 women. The goal for the future was to enroll 70 students. Twenty seven students were enrolled during the 1965-1966 academic year. Sixteen of these students were MB, eight were NAB, one was BGC, and eight were from other church communities, indicating that OBS served many students beyond just those who were affiliated with the three supporting groups. In fact, approximately one half of the 60 students who graduated from the school during the eleven years of its existence were from outside the supporting denominations (Memo from the MB missionaries in Japan, November 15, 1975). In many ways, OBS seemed to be serving its supporting bodies and the larger Christian community very well.

But the cooperative arrangements upon which OBS was founded did not last very long. I will turn next to the story of the demise of OBS.

#### COMING APART: MENNONITE BRETHREN “WITHDRAWAL” AND THE “DISSOLUTION” OF THE OSAKA BIBLICAL SEMINARY

The complicated practical arrangements did not seem to be the main issues in the “withdrawal” of the MBs from OBS. Finances, staffing, the basic structure of the school, facilities, student enrollment, etc. all seemed to be working well enough. Apparently, it was primarily differences in theology that led to the final demise of OBS, though, as we will see, there were other contributing factors as well. Of course there is some possibility that theology was just a cover for other underlying issues such as financial, organizational, or, even, personality differences. It is also possible that Japanese language records, or the records of the other missions, or the recollections of people who were directly involved show something different, but I will review some of what the MB mission archival records show concerning how it happened that OBS came to an end. I will cite some of the early indications that the MBs in Japan were never entirely happy with what was happening at OBS. I will briefly summarize some of the many memos, minutes, reports and correspondence that followed the announcement of the JMBC that they had no intention of participating in OBS in the future. And I will summarize in greater detail some of the points that were made by Dr. Harry Friesen in a long letter that he sent to MB Mission Administrator, J. H. Epp, on

September 29, 1970, explaining what was happening. This letter was dated just a few weeks before the MB *kyoudan kyougikai* (Conference) ratified the recommendation of their pastors that they not participate in OBS but begin their own school instead. The letter provides the most complete explanation that I have found of the reasons behind the action of the JMBC, at least as matters were reported from the perspective of the MB missionaries in Japan. I will also summarize Japanese language minutes of a joint meeting between JMBC pastors and MB missionaries that was held on June 22, 1970 that indicate that the MB missionaries were not entirely forth-coming in their reports on how it happened that the MBs withdrew from OBS.

In his letter, Harry Friesen reported that the complaints that the MBs had about the school were repeatedly expressed in statements to the president of OBS and in faculty meetings, but he made no references to written protestations that were made by the MBs in the years prior to the end of the school. Of course I have no access to what might have been spoken verbally, but I have located several written statements that indicate that at least some of the MB missionaries and Japanese leaders had reservations about cooperative arrangements from the very earliest stages in the development of OBS.

At first there was widely shared enthusiasm for the development of a cooperative pastoral training program. The mission boards, their administrators, and the missionaries on the field all expressed optimism that a cooperative school could be successfully operated by the three missions, enabling them to do together what no one group could do alone. But, as early as September 14, 1960, Harry Friesen expressed some personal misgivings in a letter to J. B. Toews.

Frankly, I have some concern about bringing dis-unity into our own work through a cooperative program. The more one hears of the trouble of other missionaries, of the disunity and lack of oneness in theological views, the more we are made aware of the blessing of the Lord upon our own training program, even though it is lacking in some areas.

During the May 12, 1963 meeting of the Japanese Advisory Committee, the MBs expressed their concerns about how the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis were being treated at OBS. The MB position was that the early chapters of Genesis should be interpreted literally, but other perspectives were being

introduced at OBS, causing some confusion among the MB students. Of course this raised questions about the nature of “academic freedom” at OBS and about what kind of statement of faith teachers at OBS should be required to sign. How much diversity and openness should be permitted? The MBs repeatedly called for less emphasis on “academic freedom” and a greater degree of “indoctrination” in teaching methodologies at OBS.

The minutes of the June 8, 1964 meeting of the OBS board reported that “A deep concern was manifested that the MBs ‘feel a strong compulsion to conduct a Bible School for their own conference.’” This matter was discussed “at length” in the OBS board meeting and then, again, in the August 31, 1964 meeting of the Home Advisory Committee (HAC) in North America. The problem was that OBS would be weakened if the MBs initiated a separate Bible School of their own. The HAC expressed the hope that the need that the JMBC felt for their own Bible School could be accommodated within the structure of the cooperative school.

In a June 9, 1964 meeting of the Japanese Advisory Committee, the representatives of all three groups expressed the desire that OBS include both a seminary and a Bible School program. The minutes of that meeting also report:

A question was raised as to whether the matter of academic freedom presently being practiced in OBS is satisfactory to the M.B. While they do not object to this point, the M.B. expressed a definite dissatisfaction in the present situation. They would like to have more Bible content and more definite indoctrination.

Dallas Theological Seminary missiologist and member of the MB Board of Foreign Missions, Dr. G. W. Peters, who was present in the June 1964 meeting, concurred. He “stressed the need for indoctrination in a Bible School program. This indoctrination is to enable the student to have a clear, firm position on the Biblical fundamentals.”

MB discomfort continued to manifest itself from time to time. In a May 12, 1969 meeting of the Japanese Advisory Committee, the MBs again raised questions about how the Genesis accounts of creation were being taught. And in an October 14, 1969 meeting of the Japanese Advisory Committee, the representatives agreed that it would be difficult to make decisions about substantive issues until all three Japanese church bodies were committed to cooperation, and that had



not yet happened. Two months later, on December 9, 1969 the Advisory Committee agreed that the fundamental question that needed to be answered was: What kind of pastors does the school seek to produce?

The first reference to a formal, written expression of MB concerns about OBS that I have found is in the “President’s Report” to the OBS board during their April 21, 1970 meeting. President Fred Moore reported to the board that a committee representing the MB *Kyoudan* (conference) had met with him to present a “letter” from the JMBC to the OBS board. MB Pastor Arita was present to explain the document to the board during their April, 1970 meeting. Since some of these same concerns re-appear repeatedly in subsequent expressions of MB concerns about OBS, I will briefly summarize the list of concerns presented to the board as recorded by the secretary, NAB missionary Richard Mayforth.

1. Relationships between the MBs and OBS were different than relationships between the Baptist groups and the seminary because the MBs had begun the school in order to prepare leaders for their own churches.
2. Baptist church polity differs from MB church organization. Baptist congregations are more autonomous than MB congregations, which are part of a strong conference.
3. MB theology is dispensational, including eschatological specifics such as the pre-tribulation, pre-millennial return of Christ.
4. Theological differences between earlier and later graduates of the school might threaten the unity of the JMBC.
5. The JMBC has no concerns about the full-time missionary teachers at the seminary, but some of the part-time instructors represent theological traditions that differ in specific areas from the official position of the school.

MB Pastor Arita also presented a series of suggestions or requests for the board.

1. There needs to be a document that is more specific regarding what is taught at OBS, and how it is taught. Cooperation at OBS is based on a set of shared theological convictions and respect for one another when there are differences. It would be helpful to have a document that clarifies how respect for differences will be handled in the classroom.

2. Since most students at OBS arrive with very little background understanding of matters of Christian faith, academic freedom must be limited. Students must first be indoctrinated in basic Christian truths before they are exposed to “liberal” perspectives on Christian faith.
3. “The suggestion was made that in considering prospective part time teachers a non-specialist with clear faith and convictions is preferable to an academic specialist with less clear faith and convictions.”
4. The records of early meetings and agreements regarding the use of Thiessen’s systematic theology should be reviewed in order to clarify what exactly the theological bases for cooperation really were.

A communication from the MB Board of Missions and Services shortly after the April meeting, dated June 9, 1970 served as a catalyst for the JMBC to make some crucial decisions about their future participation in OBS. The long range intention of BOMAS was that pastoral training programs should be the responsibility of the national conferences, not the foreign mission. This was part of the long-term goal of establishing national conferences that were “indigenous,” meaning that they would be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. A seminary program such as OBS should eventually be managed, staffed, and financed by the Japanese conferences. The MB board recognized that this could not be accomplished overnight, so they suggested that one step might be to add one representatives from each of the three supporting national conferences to the OBS Board of Directors. Fuller representation and, eventually, complete control of the school by the Japanese conferences could come later, when the JMBC was larger, had more resources, and was in a position to assume full responsibility for its share of the staffing, management, and finances. BOMAS did not expect that the JMBC would assume all of these responsibilities anytime soon.

Of course there was nothing new or unique about this as a long-term goal. The goal of every (or almost every) mission was to establish church communities that were “indigenous.” Missionary leadership at OBS had been eager to include Japanese in the faculty and input from the national conferences of the supporting groups from the beginning. The establishment of a Japanese Advisory Committee in 1964 was an early step in that direction, as was a later proposal to add representatives from the Japanese conferences to the OBS Board of Directors.

The minutes of a meeting of the OBS board on March 17, 1967 report that the board was eager to do exactly that. Perhaps it was premature to have equal Japanese representation on the board (two missionaries and two Japanese from each of the three supporting groups), but it might be appropriate to begin with the addition of one Japanese from each conference to the two missionary representatives from each of the three mission groups. So there were “pressures” from both the MB mission board and the board of the seminary inviting the JMBC to assume a greater degree of responsibility in the operation of OBS.

A discussion of the BOMAS communication concerning “indigenizing” the seminary was on the agenda of the Japanese Advisory Committee on June 9, 1970. On June 22, 1970, approximately two months after Rev. Arita’s meeting with the OBS board, in what was undoubtedly the most important in the series of events leading to the withdrawal of the MBs and the eventual demise of OBS, the MB missionaries and the pastors of the JMBC met to discuss the future of relationships between the JMBC and OBS. I found numerous references to this joint meeting but I was unable to locate in the archives any minutes or any acknowledgement of missionary involvement in this meeting. I was made aware of the fact that missionaries were present in the meeting only when the Japanese language minutes were sent to me by JMBC pastor friends. The minutes were sent to me because an earlier draft of my report attributed responsibility for the unilateral “withdrawal” of the MBs from OBS entirely to the JMBC pastors. The minutes make it clear that missionaries were present and contributed to this important early meeting. The Japanese language minutes provide a corrective to the misleading and one-sided account of what happened that is available in the archival records.

Because of the importance of the June 22, 1970 meeting, I will briefly summarize the Japanese-language minutes. The meeting was held in the Amagasaki Christian Church (MB). The meeting was attended by eight Japanese pastors and church workers (Arita, Jiro Takeda, Kura, Hatakenaka, Oyama, Ishiga, Kadota, Tsujikawa) and six MB missionaries (Wohlgemuth, Bartel, Krause, Friesen, R. Wiens, Miss Wiens). The meeting was chaired by Rev. Jiro Takeda and the minutes were recorded by Rev. Kura. The theme of the meeting was “Concerning the Seminary Problem.”

The first question was: “Why has this problem occurred?” This question was answered with six points:

1. When the transition from the MB Bible Institute to Osaka Biblical Seminary was decided, only the three mission organizations were involved in the process. Japanese members of the three conferences had no role in the decision-making process.
2. Henry Thiessen’s systematic theology was adopted as the theological standard for the seminary, but each of the three groups had their own understanding of what this meant, leading to differing interpretations of biblical texts.
3. The Confession of Faith that was adopted by OBS was very simple and inadequate. A more detailed Confession of Faith was needed. It was noted that the OBS Confession of Faith was developed by the three North American mission administrators who served as the Home Advisory Committee for OBS.
4. The role of the faculty in the administration of OBS was too strong and the criteria for hiring part-time teachers were too vague.
5. OBS placed too much emphasis on raising the academic level rather than on producing the kinds of church workers who can build an indigenous church in Japan.
6. These issues became more serious when the mission began to transfer responsibilities from the mission to the Japanese pastors and groups.

The second question addressed in the meeting was: “What should be done?”

First, the six MB missionaries were asked to express their own personal opinions, which were summarized by Rev. Kura as follows:

Krause: I am dissatisfied with the current state of affairs.

Bartel: It is a mistake to focus on university graduates.

Wohlgemuth: Japanese people did not participate in the beginning of the seminary. The curriculum has become very broad. The budget has expanded. Because the times have changed, it would be best if the MB Conference assumed responsibility.

R. Wiens: I am dissatisfied with the doctrinal position of the seminary.

Miss Wiens: Wouldn't it be fine if we continue on as we are now?

Friesen: Things cannot continue on as they are now. Something must be done. A more detailed Confession of Faith is necessary. The students welcome teachers who are professional experts but this is disastrous for faith. If things continue as they are now, OBS will be a flavorless school that has no particular distinctives at all.

Rev. Kura summarized the conclusions: The opinions expressed by the Japanese pastors and the missionaries are in agreement. Conditions as they are now at OBS are not acceptable.

1. The JMBC cannot expect OBS, as it is now, to produce the kinds of theological students and evangelists that are hoped for.
2. We cannot expect that OBS, as it is now, will produce the kinds of spirit-filled evangelists to serve MB and other local churches.
3. In terms of faith and doctrine, the evangelists being produced by OBS are rootless and disconnected. They have no particular "flavor" or distinctives. One question is whether the seminary should become Anabaptist or dispensational.
4. Since each of the three cooperating groups has their own particular position, we cannot expect to reach compromises.

And, finally, on the basis of this discussion, we are firmly resolved to re-evaluate the cooperative arrangements of the Osaka Biblical Seminary.

The major outcome of the June 22, 1970 meeting was the decision, finalized by the JMBC pastors, to decline to participate in the Osaka Biblical Seminary, but, rather, to begin their own new MB school instead.

Rev. Kura's minutes do not record this, but according to information in an email (March 11, 2019) from Dr. Minamino, Dean of the MB Evangelical Biblical Seminary, "Even though the missionaries left the meeting at the moment of the crucial decision, they took part in the meeting and expressed their complaints about OBS at least... It is not fair, we felt, that the responsibility of leaving OBS should be ascribed only to JMBC."

One month after the joint meeting of MB pastors and missionaries in June, Dr. Richard Schilke, Director of the NAB mission board, and J. H. Epp, Executive Director of the MB Board of Missions and Services were present for the July 21, 1970 meeting of the OBS board. A major topic of discussion was a letter from Rev. Jiro Takeda, Chairman of the JMBC, addressed to the board and faculty of OBS announcing the decision of the JMBC pastors to decline any future participation in OBS. The JMBC planned to begin a new MB school instead. Pastors Takeda and Arita were present to explain to the board and the two mission administrators from North America the position of the JMBC. In their explanation, they cited the issues that are outlined in the minutes of the June 22, 1970 meeting as summarized above. They added that since the MB mission and the JMBC are entirely separate organizations, the reality was that it was the mission that was the participant in OBS, not the JMBC. The JMBC had never felt that it was part of OBS.

Rev. Arita added several points. It would be difficult for the JMBC to assume responsibility for one third of the large 8 million yen budget of OBS. OBS did not place sufficient emphasis on the Anabaptist roots of the MBs. And Pastor Arita added an observation that appears again in later explanations for the refusal of the JMBC to participate in OBS. Spiritual issues were the heart of the problem, he said (as recorded by secretary Mayforth), but “Theologically, the dispensational eschatological position may not be a decisive factor. But since it is their (the MB) official position, *they must preserve their unity within it...* They are not trying to suggest that the other groups are theologically more liberal than they are. *But they feel that their cooperation in the school is a threat to their internal unity.*” (Emphasis mine.) For Rev. Arita, it seems, dispensational theology was not an end in itself. Dispensational theology was a means to construct and maintain MB community solidarity. The real problem with MB cooperation with OBS was that this would threaten cohesion within the MB community.

In response, the board pointed out that “.. from the beginning a statement of faith clear on essentials but sufficiently broad to allow for the range of positions within all three conferences in the U.S., including the M.B., was deliberately and necessarily adopted. Now the M.B. Japanese conference has adopted an official position sufficiently more restrictive than its parent body as to make it difficult for them to be comfortable in the broader framework.” The board also cautioned

that the financial costs of operating their own school would be high; suggested that JMBC unity might be maintained within the structures of the cooperative agreements; withdrawal would have implications for future generations of JMBC leadership; and withdrawal would have implications not only for the MBs but also for other Christian communities.

The OBS Board, the Home Advisory Council (two of the three members of the HAC had attended the July 21 OBS board meeting), and each of the three boards of foreign missions reported the same response: They requested that the MB pastors reconsider their decision. The MB pastors then met again on September 1, 1970. They reaffirmed their decision not to participate in OBS but to begin their own school. Six weeks later, on October 19, 1970, the Japanese MB *kyoudan kyougikai* (Conference) met to respond to the recommendation from their pastors that they begin their own school rather than join the cooperative arrangements at OBS. The majority voted to accept this recommendation. The MB *kyoudan* also voted to appoint a committee to create the new school. The members of the committee were the chair of the JMBC, the five members of the JMBC education committee, and MB missionary Dr. Harry Friesen. Their goal was to open the new MB school on April 1, 1971, less than six months in the future.

All of the official bodies that were involved in OBS encouraged the JMBC to reconsider their decision. This apparently included the MB missionaries in Japan. MB missionaries Harry Friesen and Jonathan Bartel, and MB mission administrator J. H. Epp all used the same phrase to describe their final response to the actions of the JMBC: After initially being “shocked” by the decision of the JMBC, they had “gone as far as we dare to go” in encouraging the JMBC to reconsider. Any additional “pressure” might well lead to a break in the good relationships that the MB missionaries and the mission board in North America felt that they enjoyed with their Japanese brethren. It was time to recognize that the JMBC, like MB conferences in North America and elsewhere, were autonomous and free to make their own decisions. That is part of what “indigenous” means. So it was time to accept the decision of the JMBC and move on.

On December 1, 1970, just about six weeks after the decision of the MB *kyoudan*, MB missionary Jonathan Bartel, who had served as President of OBS, wrote to J. H. Epp:

I personally have mixed feelings about the whole issue... (Continued cooperation would be good), but there are basic differences... I personally am sorry that our national brethren have not given more of a hearing to the nationals of the other two groups. Our brethren have insisted that there is no point in talking because they already know that it is impossible to cooperate.

A few months later, on February 12, 1971, MB Mission Administrator J. H. Epp wrote to Harry Friesen that he was still hopeful that continued cooperation might be possible.

I am sure that eventually our brethren will have to learn how to work together with others where there are bound to be differences, but during this time of getting their roots established they, no doubt, will need to go the route that they have chosen to go. We want to support them with a spirit of love and understanding.

I will quote one paragraph from a report (undated) on the year 1970 written by Rev. Fred Moore, NAB missionary who served as president of OBS at that time. This is written from the perspective of a non-MB who was deeply involved in everything that happened at OBS. After a brief review of how OBS came into existence, President Moore wrote the following:

The basic problem is that the Japanese pastors who had received their training at the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute (the predecessor of OBS) had been taught a rather strict, dispensational interpretation of the Bible, including a fully-developed eschatological position, in such a way as to delineate any other theological position as “non-Biblical.” During these past years, as the Mennonite Brethren Church Conference (“M.B. Kyodan”) has developed, these men, due to their seniority, have assumed the leadership of their conference. At the same time, the younger M.B. pastors, who have since graduated from OBS, have been exposed to a considerably wider range of theological thought, although entirely in the evangelical, traditional Baptist – Free Church framework. Under the aegis of their leaders, the M. B. Kyodan has developed for itself a very detailed Statement of Faith which is mandatory in their churches and must be accepted and taught by their pastors. One item in that statement that is a



particular source of trouble is the very specific position regarding the pre-millennial (sic), pre-tribulation rapture of the Church; this is used to define the limits of Christian fellowship. The rest of us at OBS are not, of course, opposed to that theological position regarding the rapture of the Church; but we are opposed to the idea that this is the only possible position consistent with the Scriptures. At any rate, in the meetings of the OBS Board of Directors, the representative of the M.B. Kyodan expressed the fear of the Kyodan leaders that their church unity was in danger of being disrupted if their students are exposed to anything other than their particularly-defined position, and so the M.B. Kyodan has decided to withdraw from OBS and re-establish its own separate theological training program. Logically, for the purposes that they have in mind, they have no other alternative. The M.B. Mission, while deeply regretting the stand that the church conference has taken, feels that since it is here in Japan to serve with and work with the Kyodan, it must go along with them.

Rev. Moore's perspective, whether accurate or not, does reflect a view that was shared by others who were involved in the conversations that took place regarding the decision of the JMBC not to join in participation in OBS.

In a June 18, 1971 (one year after the initial decision of the MB pastors), JMBC chair, Pastor Jiro Takeda, wrote to the OBS Board:

We Japanese MB Conference under the deep consideration of the differences and circumstances of the three churches, inform you that as for us there is no possibility and no probability of the cooperation in any form with the two Baptist Churches in future as far as theological education is concerned.

The JMBC pastors saw no point in even meeting with their Baptist counterparts to discuss the possibility of future cooperation.

The most carefully and completely articulated explanation of what was behind the decision of the JMBC to refrain from any participation in OBS that I have located was given in a long letter written by Dr. Harry Friesen to MB Mission Administrator, J. H. Epp. The letter, to which I referred above, is dated September 29, 1970.

He began by taking issue with the Minutes of the July 21, 1970 meeting of the OBS board that had been attended by Rev. J. H. Epp. Harry Friesen did not agree that "the J.M.B. Conference has adopted an official position sufficiently more restricted than its parent body as to make it difficult for them to be comfortable in the broader framework of the cooperative effort." He then attempted to make the case that the dispensationalism written into the JMBC Confession of Faith was entirely consistent with the theological position of the Mennonite Brethren in North America. The JMBC COF was based on official North American COFs "supplemented" and "enlarged upon" by other materials that were sent to him by former MB Mission Administrator, A. E. Janzen.

The "request" of the MB Mission Administrators and board that the JMBC should eventually assume the MB mission's one-third interest in OBS "caused the J.M.B. Conference to come out in the open with their concerns and express an official reaction. I believe that they surprised all of us in their response!" They "shocked" everyone involved with their decision to refuse all cooperation with OBS and begin their own school. The JMBC was pushed to this position by pressure from the MB mission board, but this only served to expose other issues and concerns.

If cooperation at this time will end, the M.B.'s are most likely to be made the scape-goat, whereas in reality it is the action of the other missions who for a long time ignored the definite concerns expressed by the M.B.

Conference to Pres. Moore and others privately and in faculty meetings.

Harry Friesen also reported that in a joint meeting on September 25, 1970 between the JMBC education committee and representative of the Japan MB mission,

It became obvious that the M. B. Conference will not consider entering into any type of cooperating theological education. They are deeply convinced that this decision is necessary for them to continue in unity as a conference and in expanding their evangelistic outreach. Any further pressure put upon them from the Mission or our North American constituency would only serve to disrupt the good working relationship which the missionaries and the U.S. brotherhood now enjoys with the Japan M. B. Conference... They feel that doctrine is far more important than dollars and are willing to suffer financial lose (sic) and restrictions in order to carry on in Japan as

they feel led of God. We can only bid them God's speed and pray for them and assist them in teaching personal (sic) or finances as they may be disposed to accept. All aid must be without strings attached. We must praise God for such earnest and dedicated men who at all cost feel they must be free to follow Scripture as they believe God is leading them.

In spite of their decision not to participate, the M.B.s proposed that they would continue their support for OBS for two more years but they would begin their own school in April 1971, the spring of the following year.

The refusal of future JMBC participation in OBS immediately raised a host of practical problems that needed to be solved. What about students currently enrolled in the school? What about prospective students? What were the implications for the teachers? How would financial arrangements be handled during the interim two years? It was relatively easy for the JMBC to "withdraw" since they had never actually been full participants, but what about the MB mission that was contractually committed to cooperation? What would be the process for the MB mission to "withdraw"? Would the two Baptist missions continue to operate OBS without MB participation? What about the interest held by the MB mission in OBS property?

A major issue that required attention was whether the MBs had a legal right to "withdraw" from the cooperative arrangements. The OBS Constitution made provision for a mutually agreed-upon "dissolution" of the cooperative arrangements but it made no reference to the unilateral "withdrawal" of one of the participants. Perspectives varied. The member of the OBS board who represented the Japanese Baptist General Conference (BGC) suggested that the board should reject the decision to withdraw because neither the JMBC nor the MB mission had any legal right to take this unilateral action. But the legal situation was actually not entirely clear. An attorney in Winnipeg, Canada who advised the MB mission pointed out that it all depended on the legal jurisdiction under which OBS had its legal status. Each Canadian province and each state in the U.S. had its own legal frameworks, and Japan had its own, too.

The opinion of the Canadian attorney who advised the MBs was that in his opinion, in principle OBS was organized as a "partnership" and, in the event that one partner left the arrangement, that partner would be entitled to the same

proportion of assets that the partner had invested, so each of the three missions should receive one third of the income from the sale of the property, since each mission had invested one third in the original purchase of the property and construction of the buildings. But an attorney who advised the Baptists saw things differently. OBS was more like a “corporation.” If one party unilaterally “withdraws,” that party is entitled to none of the assets since they all remain with the “corporation.”

All three missions in Japan and all three boards in North America agreed that financial settlements should be reached in a Christian, brotherly way, by mutual consent, regardless of what the letter of the law might say. But it was not at all self-evident just what a fair and Christian settlement might look like. The Baptists suggested that a 40%-40%-20% division of assets, with 20% going to the MBs, would be generous since the MBs had unilaterally withdrawn, so they actually deserved nothing. The MBs argued that assets should be divided evenly since that is how the original investments had been shared. In fact, in one report (July 15, 1972) to the MB mission administration, the MB missionaries in Japan summarized all of the operating expenditures that had been made during the eleven years that OBS was in operation and pointed out that the MBs had contributed approximately one half of the total funds (MBs 22.1 million yen, NAB 11.5 million, BGC 8.9 million), so perhaps the MBs should receive some extra consideration to make things more equal. Of course part of this differential was a product of the funding formula which was based on the ratio of students from each denomination who were enrolled in OBS. There were questions, too, about where the money might come from if the Baptists were required to “buy out” the MB share if they decided to continue OBS as a Baptist seminary.

On September 22, 1971, one year after the MB *kyoudan* had decided against participation in OBS, and in the midst of the many ensuing controversies, Dr. Harry Friesen sent another letter to J. H. Epp. He was not as restrained as he had been one year earlier. The MBs had not simply “withdrawn” from OBS. “As we have said before, the MBs have been driven out if anything.” And the entire arrangement had been flawed from the beginning. The Constitution, he said, had been written for “an American audience.” The term “pre-millennial,” he wrote, had been removed from the draft constitution at the insistence of Dr. Schilke, NAB mission administrator, “because some members of his denomination were

not of that persuasion.” In so doing, the theological convictions of the MB missionaries in Japan and the JMBC had been ignored. But in saying this Harry Friesen had apparently forgotten that in the second meeting of the HAC in 1960 MB mission administrator J. B. Toews, reflecting the consensus of many MB historians and theologians, and speaking on behalf of the mission board, had explicitly stated that the official MB theological position in North America was NOT dispensational or premillennial. Harry Friesen himself had recognized one year earlier that many MB pastors and teachers in North America did not hold this position. So Harry Friesen was not entirely accurate in his account of what had happened.

By January, 1972, the OBS board and the HAC acknowledged that OBS was no longer viable as an institution. On March 31, 1972, in the final meeting of the OBS board in which MBs participated, the board reported that “It was recognized that this ends a period of close cooperation in the theological education of our missions and churches in Japan.” Words of thanks were exchanged, prayers were spoken, and the MB representatives left the meeting. The Osaka Biblical Seminary was no more. What remained was a process for the disposal of the properties and distribution of the assets.

The OBS board initially appointed a “Property Settlement Committee” (PSC) to negotiate financial arrangements that would be acceptable to all of the parties involved, but, after both the OBS board and the Home Advisor Committee (HAC) ceased to exist, in March of 1976 the three mission boards appointed Japan missionary representatives to serve together on a “Joint Ikeda Property Settlement Committee” that would report directly to the three mission boards. This committee reached agreement on eight “Principles of Property Settlement,” the first and most important of which was that OBS assets should be divided equally between the three missions. After receiving several appraisals of the value of the properties, the final decision was that the most equitable arrangement would be for the MB mission to receive 252 tsubo of land that included the dormitory building where the JMBC established their new school; the North American Baptists would receive 252 tsubo of land that included the Administration Building; and the Baptist General Conference would receive 500 tsubo of land (with no building). When the two Baptist groups concluded that it

would be impossible for them to continue a seminary program on their own, the Baptist properties were sold.

Some MB leaders in North America were concerned about what the mission board was doing in Japan, including specifically the end of the cooperative arrangements at OBS. On June 2, 1972 Canadian and U.S. MB leader, Dr. Frank C. Peters, sent a letter to Waldo Hiebert, then chair of BOMAS, (with copies to Marvin Hein and Dr. Vernon Wiebe, then BOMAS administrator) reporting that Dr. Peters had been surprised to be informed at a meeting of the North American Baptist convention where he was lecturing that the MBs had withdrawn from OBS. He had known nothing about this.

I was led to believe that this had happened because of our distrust of their theology. Specifically, the charge was that we were quite dispensational in our theology and, since they were not, we withdrew. I just cannot believe that this is the story. If it is, I want to bring this matter up at the next meeting of BORAC (Board of Reference and Counsel, later Board of Faith and Life) and eventually at the General Conference sessions... Perhaps another issue is the charge that we withdrew unilaterally without consultation. Is this true? ... Please let me know what really happened because I was caught without an explanation. What is even worse, without knowledge that it had happened, but that might be my fault.

In the response that J. H. Epp sent to Dr. Peters and others at the request of Dr. Wiebe, Rev. Epp reviewed the origins of OBS, noted that JMBC leaders had expressed discontent with the school, and that they had reached their decision to withdraw partly in response to the BOMAS request that the JMBC assume greater administrative responsibility (i.e. membership in the OBS board). J. H. Epp also referred to several points that had been made by JMBC leader Masaru Arita, including the fact that OBS was operated very much as an "American school." Specifically, Rev. Arita was concerned that "academic freedom" at OBS meant that students who had not yet established their own firm theological convictions through "indoctrination" were being exposed to a variety of theological options, including lecturers who held "neo-orthodox views in scriptural interpretation." He also felt that there was not enough teaching on Anabaptism. J. H. Epp emphasized the fact that the decision to withdraw had been made by the JMBC "without the

presence of missionaries.” The missionaries in Japan and the mission board had initially been surprised by the JMBC decision, he said, but “As things look now, there seems to be no alternative but to let the Japanese Conference develop their own training program.” J. H. Epp also noted that MBs in North America had not set a very good example. Not only were the MBs unable to cooperate with Baptists in theological education, but they were having trouble even keeping Canadian and U.S. MBs together in support of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. He made no mention of Dr. F. C. Peters’ concern that dispensationalism had been a major factor in the JMBC decision to withdraw from OBS.

As was the case in the comments of Rev. Epp, in all of the reports and correspondence that were available to me in the MB mission archives, I was unable to discover any hint that the missionaries had actually been present and contributed to the crucial meeting during which the JMBC pastors made their decision not to participate in OBS.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I will offer several concluding general comments about the story of the rise and fall of Osaka Biblical Seminary.

1. OBS demonstrated the fact that, for a time (eleven years) at least, a cooperative venture in theological education was possible. Three evangelical organizations were able to come together in agreements that served not only many of the interests of the cooperating denominations but also the larger evangelical community in Japan and beyond.
2. The MBs were willing to prioritize cooperation with other evangelicals over faithfulness to their own Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage of non-resistance and peace-making. The missionaries and JMBC leaders showed little interest in cooperative relationships with the Mennonite Central Committee and the missions of the other “historic peace churches” who were establishing new Christian communities in Japan. In doing so, the fears of mission leaders such as J. B. Toews and GC missiologist, Robert Ramseyer, were realized. A narrow, individualistic, legalistic, defensive fundamentalism and dispensationalism replaced the more open, inclusive and irenic Mennonite form of Christianity such as had been demonstrated by the first MCC-MB workers in Japan, Rev. Henry G.

and Lydia Thielman and others, including missionary Miss Ruth Wiens, apparently the lone MB missionary voice in support of continuing OBS as a cooperative enterprise.

3. The founding MB missionaries in Japan were eager to realize unity and cohesion in their churches, almost at all costs. In this emphasis on their own internal Christian community they were very “Mennonite.” But, in my opinion, they had a misplaced confidence that Christian community could be constructed and maintained on a narrow and dogmatic fundamentalist theological foundation. They were overly confident in their ability to build rigid theological and ethical boundaries around their community and to “indoctrinate” their members and pastors within those boundaries. They demonstrated little confidence that the Spirit of God could provide guidance and strength through ecumenical conversation and cooperation in the larger *missio Deo*, the “mission of God.” They were convinced that even cooperation with evangelical Baptist groups would make it “impossible” for them to construct and maintain their own unique MB communal identity.

4. Whether the missionaries were present in the room at the crucial moment or not, the decision made by the leaders of the JMBC to withdraw reflected very directly the fundamentalist and separatist convictions in which the early MB missionaries had “indoctrinated” their first group of pastors. Most of the early MB missionaries and pastors were alike in their confidence that their community could thrive only if they trained their leaders in the dispensational theology they themselves had been taught, and they could accomplish this only if they did this alone, without the diluting influences of even their fellow Baptist evangelicals. In their decision not to participate in OBS but to begin their own new school instead, the leaders of the JMBC reflected the convictions of the MB missionaries who had been their teachers, mentors, and role-models.

5. I do not know what Rev. Kyou’ichi Kitano thought about the dissolution of the Osaka Biblical Seminary. I do know that he was convinced that theological education in Japan needed to be at a fairly high level because the Japanese people were well educated and would have high expectations for their pastors. Intellectual and cultural sophistication and spiritual depth can be developed in



many different contexts besides just in universities and seminaries, but experiences in the West and elsewhere indicate that schools can help.

6. Finally, it was troubling to learn, through the Japanese-language minutes, that six MB missionaries had been present in the crucial meeting on June 22, 1970 during which agreement was first reached that continuing the cooperative arrangements at OBS was not acceptable to the MBs. It is possible that I overlooked something, but in spite of a careful search, I was unable to locate any English language record in the mission archives that acknowledged the fact that missionaries were present at this meeting. As indicated above, there were several reports from MB missionaries that they had been “shocked” when the JMBC announced their decision not to join in the cooperative arrangements at OBS. It is not likely that mission administrator, J. H. Epp, was aware of missionary presence in the June 22, 1970 meeting since he reported to Dr. F. C. Peters that the decision not to participate had been made by the JMBC “without the presence of missionaries.” This might have been technically accurate, since the final decisions were formalized by the JMBC without the physical presence of the missionaries, but it was disingenuous at best when the missionaries reported that they were “surprised” by the JMBC decision. Five of the six missionaries who had participated in the June 22, 1970 had indicated their dissatisfaction with current conditions at OBS and had shared in agreement with the JMBC pastors that continued participation in OBS was unacceptable to the MBs. Perhaps the missionaries were “shocked” that the pastors moved so quickly, or that they were so strongly resolved that they would not even discuss the matter with their Japanese Baptist counterparts. Perhaps the missionaries refrained from openly reporting their participation in the meeting because they were aware, as was, in fact, indicated in the response of Dr. F. C. Peters, that many MB leaders in North America would have disapproved of the kind of narrow, fundamentalist, dispensational and separatist MB church community the missionaries were attempting to establish in Japan. At worst, perhaps what appears to be dissembling on the part of the missionaries is an example of the criticism made by Rev. Kitano, pastor Arita and others that the MB missionaries could not always be trusted to tell the whole truth. They sometimes said one thing but did another. But perhaps this should not really come as a surprise. We all carry our Christian

truths in earthen vessels. In the well-known words of Jesus, “Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.” (John 8:7)

Of course the MB missionaries in Japan did not carry out their ministries in isolation. They were not simply free to do whatever they pleased. As has been clear from early in the history of MB missions, missionaries were financed by and served under the direction of MB mission boards and administrators. In order to fulfill their responsibilities, mission administrators paid periodic visits to the various fields, including Japan, and reported their findings to the board. I will next summarize some of these administrative reports on MB mission work in Japan.

## 12. TAKING MEASURE: MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSION ADMINISTRATIVE VISITS, REPORTS AND EVALUATIONS

During the early decades of MB mission history, administrative structures were minimal. It was assumed that missionaries were called by God and the church, trained in seminaries, and sent to their foreign fields with confidence that they would follow the accepted mission practices of the day, which usually meant the establishment of compounds and ministering to the spiritual and material needs of the mostly poor people around them. It was also assumed that following the call to missions was a life-time commitment. Prayer and financial support were provided by individuals and congregations in the homeland. The major function of mission boards was to assist in soliciting support and then to channel funds to the appropriate destinations. Organizational structures were weak and staffs were small. Administrative visits to the fields would have seemed like an unnecessary waste of valuable funds and time. J. B. Toews explained in several places that his administrative travel expenses were not paid with mission funds. His sister-in-law, Grace Unruh, designated money for that purpose, he said.

The first record of a visit to a field by an MB mission administrator that I have found in the archival records was when A. E. Janzen visited the MB mission fields in 1948. In 1955 when J. B. Toews arrived in India for an administrative visit, two of the senior MB missionaries greeted him with the “gruff question,” “What do you want here?” (*JB*, p. 160) So in 1957 when MB Mission Executive Secretary J. B. Toews and two board members flew to Asia for an administrative visit to several countries, such visits were still relatively new. Their visit represented a new level of “bureaucratization” of MB mission programs. In the years following,

administrative visits to Japan took place every few years, and, as far as I can tell, these visits were welcomed by the missionaries in Japan. I did not sense any feelings of adversarial relationships between the missionaries and the mission administrators. At least not as far as I can recall and not in the written materials that I surveyed.

I will summarize in some detail the reports from only two of these administrative visits to Japan: first, the group led by J. B. Toews in 1957, and, second, a report that was prepared 40 years later, in 1997, by Mennonite Church missiologist Dr. Robert Lee, at the request of the MB mission board. Other reports that I have seen are shorter than these two and they tended to focus more specifically on administrative details.

Similar topics show up in virtually every report. There were expressions of gratitude to God for the sincerity of the missionaries and the hard work that they were doing. There were words of appreciation for the hospitality of their missionary and Japanese hosts, and admiration for the quality of the Japanese people whom they met, both Christians and others. The same administrative agenda items show up in almost every report: budgets, property matters, concern about economic inflation, application of mission policies to the situation in Japan, missionary residences, furlough and retirement policies, health issues, the education of missionary children, etc. There were always conflicts to address: personality, theology, missionary-national worker relationships, and budget priorities. The visits always included ministries in the churches, meetings with missionaries and JMBC pastors, fellowship with church members, efforts to resolve conflicts, and, often, some sightseeing visits to places of historical, cultural and religious significance. Other persistent themes mentioned in these reports are the need for more mission personnel to minister to the massive numbers of people in Japan, and the need for more funds to support the missionaries with the land and buildings they needed for their work in an economic environment characterized by ever-increasing inflation.

REV. J. B. TOEWS: JUNE, 1957

At the time of the Toews visit in June, 1957, MB missionaries had been in Japan for just five or six years, two of which had been mostly consumed with language study. The MB missionary staff present in Japan at that time consisted of five

missionary families (Friesen, Bartel, Wiens, Krause, Balzer) and two single women (Wiens and Gunther). They had adopted their strategy for their work just two years before, in 1955. There were about 100 members in the five MB churches: Kasugade, Ishibashi, Tsurugaoka, Nagase and Amagasaki. Approximately one half of these 100 members were in the Ishibashi Church, so the other four groups were still very small. The Bible school had just begun to meet in the Kasugade church, the former MCC Center.

The leader of the visiting group was Rev. John B. Toews (1906-1998), almost always called “J.B. Toews.” At that time he was the executive secretary of the MB Board of Foreign Missions. Because he was one of the most influential leaders of the Mennonite Brethren during much of the twentieth century, I will provide a brief introduction. J. B. Toews was born in the Mennonite Molotschna Colony in S. Russia. He and his family suffered through the horrors of the Russian revolution, the raids of the anarchist, Machno and his bands, and then the battles between the German and Russian armies during World War I. He and most of his family were able to make a dramatic escape from Russia in 1927, when John B. was 21 years old. The family settled on a farm near the Mennonite village of Coaldale, Alberta, Canada. After many years of spiritual struggle, J. B. Toews yielded to what he perceived as the call of God and became a minister. Among many other positions, J. B. Toews was the pastor of two important MB churches; a historic congregation in Buhler, Kansas and in Reedley California, at that time the largest MB congregation in the world. He served as president of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba and during most of a ten year period (1954 - 1963) he was the executive secretary of the MB foreign mission program. In 1963, J. B. Toews left his leadership position with the mission board to teach in the MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, where he was soon appointed to the presidency. After his term as president, J. B. Toews devoted himself to historical work, establishing the MB historical archives in the Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific College (now University), collecting materials, and writing. The joke that J. B. Toews was “the MB Pope” (and Hillsboro, Kansas was the MB “Vatican”) was more than just a joke. So for over a period of 50 years J. B. Toews was one of the most influential leaders in the MB church in North America and worldwide. If there was a “patriarch” of the MB church, it was J. B. Toews.

Rev. Toews was accompanied on his administrative visit to Japan by two mission board members. C. A. DeFehr, was a successful businessman and church leader from Winnipeg, Canada, and Rev. J. P. Kliwer, was the pastor of the large MB church in Corn, Oklahoma. Before their ten days in Japan, their tour took them to Korea. From Japan they visited Taiwan, Hong Kong, Viet Nam and India. Their visit to India was part of a process of “nationalization” of the MB church in India that included the dramatic and controversial withdrawal of all of the senior MB missionaries from that country. But I will report on only the Japan part of their journey.

According to J. B. Toews’ long report dated June 29, 1957, the group began their Japan visit by meeting in Tokyo with the leaders of several large mission agencies (Southern Baptist and Overseas Missionary Society) and with the Japanese presidents of three evangelical Bible schools and seminaries. He heard similar reports from all of the persons with whom he met: Japan was a promising place to do mission work. Unlike China and many other places in the post-colonial world, Japan was safe and open to the gospel. Missionaries faced few restrictions. Many people were responsive and the churches were growing. Growth was slow, but progress was being made. There were many reasons for being thankful to God.

But there were problems, too. According to his informants, too many of the new post-World War II missionaries, many of whom were conservative evangelicals, arrived in Japan without adequate preparation. Most were young and inexperienced. They were “immature in judgment” and inconsistent in adopting methods that were suitable to the situation in Japan. They failed to establish good relationships with missionaries who had served in Japan prior to the war and they did not relate well with the existing Japanese Christian churches. A major problem was lack of cooperation within the Christian, or even within the evangelical community, a serious hindrance to the growth of the church in Japan.

Furthermore, “Very few (of the new missionaries) seek to attain an acceptable degree of perfection in the knowledge of the language. Equally few find a sufficient degree of understanding for the cultural background of the Japanese people to meet them on proper grounds.” Rev. Toews commented after his sessions with his fellow mission administrators: “These impressions were depressing.” (Report # 4, p. 3)

The ten days that the group spent with the MB missionaries and JMBC leaders were very full. They visited the Karuizawa “rest home” in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture, each of the five MB churches, the Nosegawa campsite and the Bible school in Kasugade. Rev. Toews and Rev. Kliwer each preached numerous times. They had long meetings with the missionaries in groups and they had long counseling sessions with individuals, both missionary and Japanese. Rev. Toews sent about 35 pages of reports, divided into 18 topics. Some of the reports included descriptive materials prepared by the missionaries. The first two reports are missing from the files.

I will briefly summarize some of the issues that were mentioned by Rev. Toews in his concluding “Observations.” His first point was: “We are very grateful to God to find a good spiritual relationship among our missionaries.” In spite of many differences in background, temperament, methods, and doctrine, the “young and inexperienced” missionaries had found a way to maintain “love, patience and respect... The sincerity of the staff in relation to their calling is a further observation which gives much cause for gratitude.”

Second, as was the case in other reports from Japan, Rev. Toews was eager to speak words of gratitude to God for the MB church in Japan. “The fellowship with the believers of the Japan church becomes the occasion of much gratitude for the spiritual results which have been wrought... The spiritual response from these people to the Word is just wonderful. One can speak to them on a level as we do at home and sense a keen reception. This is a token of God’s abundant grace.”

Of course it did not take Rev. Toews long to mention several critical observations. First, he sensed “the absence of a distinct pattern of coordination.” Since “All of our missionaries on the field are young and come here with very little or no experience in Christian service as related to church work,” the missionaries were susceptible to influences of various kinds, including the charismatic movement and extreme fundamentalist separatism and legalism. They were attracted to a variety of approaches to mission work as practiced by other mission organizations. They tended to be distracted by many different ideas of what to do, including radio work, a bookstore ministry, English classes, expanding the work to Tokyo, and relating to seminary education, all of which might have their

place, but can also serve as a substitute for the hard work of planting new churches, which should be their first and highest priority.

He cited a concern that had been expressed by Rev. Kitano:

In his (Rev. Kitano's) judgment, our missionaries have not put forth sufficient effort to understand the Japanese people in their culture and language for a more effective ministry. In his judgement, the preaching ministry of several of our missionaries is not sufficiently adapted to the vital needs of the Japanese people and their efforts of evangelism have been too much dissociated from a systematic program of house visitation and follow-up.

Rev. Toews noted some issues related to the organization of the mission group on the field. Some missionaries were more dominant within the mission than they should be. He implied that the role of the single women missionaries had been too strong. He expressed concern about the relationship between what was left of MCC influences and the Japan MB church. He also noted that the "external circumstances" of the missionary life-style were not much different from middle class life in North America.

He returned several times in his report to what he referred to as the "legalism" of the missionaries that he thought was detrimental to the growth of the MB church in Japan. His Observation #13 was:

The church work on the field has suffered from the results of the legalistic approach to building a young church. People have been prohibited to attend the funeral of their nearest family, if they were buried by Buddhist rites. Attendance of such funerals has been classified as idolatry. On the same level there have been other restrictions which crossed some very tender family relations. The field has baptized about 155 people; one-third, however, has been excommunicated within a period of four years. The record is indeed regrettable. The M. B. Church is called "The hard church." How much better if it had gained the name "The Church of Love." The method of discipline has, no doubt, added to the creation of the impression "a hard church."

I was surprised to read that J. B. Toews raised questions about whether attendance at the Buddhist funeral of a family member always constituted “idolatry” or not. I do not recall any conversations, nor did I notice in any of the materials in the mission archives any discussion of any positive perspectives on Shinto and Buddhism. For most evangelical missionaries, only superstition, darkness, oppression and idolatry were associated with the traditional Japanese religions. That is what missionaries came to save people *from*. But according to the interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church and others, participating in Buddhist family rites was an expression of honor and respect for parents and ancestors. It was a way of fulfilling the fifth of the Ten Commandments and was not necessarily “idolatry.” The same principle applied to practices associated with the family *Butsudan*. It was not until later that some evangelicals began to recognize that there might be some value in dialog between Christianity and other religions. Perhaps there are things that we can learn from each other. I was surprised to see that J. B. Toews thought that the “legalistic” prohibition of attendance in Buddhist family funerals as idolatry was unfortunate.

J. B. Toews, it seems, was at least somewhat open to thoughts that moved in that direction. It appears that he understood that there was more involved in attendance in Buddhist funerals and memorials than simply idolatry. (Please recall that in Part One I briefly introduced the story of Dr. Jacob Loewen, an MB missionary and missiologist who came to view adherents of non-Christian religions in an even more positive light.)

In his Japan report, J. B. Toews offered suggestions about several of the local churches; called for more careful planning before locations for new churches were decided; and he called for a clearer long-range plan for the new Bible school.

J. B. Toews’ Report Number 14 was on the topic, “Doctrinal Differences on the Field in Japan.” One of the missionaries, David Balzer from Canada, found himself out of conformity with the consensus of the other MB missionaries in Japan on a series of theological issues. Rev. Toews asked Rev. Balzer to write down his own list of issues with which he was in disagreement with the others and then J. B. Toews and Rev. Kliwer met with all of the missionary men for a three and one-half hour discussion, chaired by visiting mission board member Rev. J. P. Kliwer.



Rev. Balzer's list consisted of (with sub-points for each): (1) Predestination and its Relationship to Divine Foreknowledge; (2) The Holy Spirit; (3) The Lord's Day; (4) Sanctification; and (5) Dispensationalism.

To J. B. Toews, it became clear that doctrinal differences were not the "basic" issue at all. The "basic" issue had to do with "personality." So J. B. Toews met with David Balzer for a personal counseling session in which he pointed this out. The "doctrinal" differences were of minimal consequence and had no relevance to the work of the mission in Japan. For example, "An incident of selling drinks on Sunday at the young people's camp had been the occasion of claiming doctrinal difference on questions of the sanctification of the Lord's Day." A review of official MB positions on the disputed matters failed to convince the missionary. "We then have admonished the brother and pointed out that he would need to find a definite adjustment in position and attitude if he expected to work as a missionary. As one brother he had no right to claim exclusiveness of judgement but has to learn to subordinate himself to the majority and become a part of them." A few days later David Balzer indicated to Rev. Toews that he wanted to "find himself." His attitude was "kind and sincere." But the legalism and approach to discipline of some of the missionaries "affecting purely cultural issues of new converts have spread a regrettable reputation of the M. B. Church... The Lord must help us in this matter."

Rev. Toews concluded his list of 18 "Observations" with the following:

The work in general has tremendous possibilities but requires much more careful planning, tact, and wisdom *than on any of our other fields*.  
(Emphasis mine.) That the Lord may give this to the Board, the administrative branch and our missionaries on the field is our sincere prayer.

I found a more positive sequel to his 1957 report in a letter that J. B. Toews sent to the mission office staff in Hillsboro, Kansas. The letter is undated, but it clearly came at the end of a second visit to Japan with former mission administrator A. E. Janzen in 1961. For some reason the letter is marked "PLEASE REMEMBER THAT ANYTHING THAT IS SAID HERE IS CONFIDENTIAL AND NOT TO BE SHARED WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC." Usually a warning such as this precedes something that is personal and negative, or even scandalous, but that is not the case here. There is

nothing critical or negative in the letter. Perhaps J. B. Toews, who was known as a stern and sometimes intimidating man, did not want people to know that he could be so effusive in his praise. After a few introductory comments about his busy and difficult ten day schedule in Japan, the letter continues:

The observations which we have made here during these days have been so uplifting. Comparing the advancement of the work of God here in Japan from that which I saw four years ago, I simply am overwhelmed and must cry out with the statement of the psalmist, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." To see a church arise which is still in its virgin love, dedicated and consecrated to the cause of Christ eager to see others saved, very conscientious in the area of a holy life. That is a treat which we find so seldom in our American circumstances. Then to note the dedication of young people, men and women of University training they love their Lord, they give up their career with great promise of economic and social realm in the future and enter into the Lord's service. These observations have touched my heart so deeply that I have been overwhelmed in praise and thanksgiving for that which God is doing.

Having been on all of our other mission fields, and on most of them several times, I have never witnessed such a rapid progress as has been recorded here during the past ten years. We want to thank God and be greatly encouraged to do our work which he has assigned to us administratively with even greater faithfulness and dedication...

I am inwardly so touched in my heart that I have even harbored the desire that I, myself, could stay here. May God raise up some missionary staff because our forces here must be strengthened. We have at present only three missionary couples and two sisters on the field. If this could be doubled at least within the next one or two years. May God give us the workers who are willing to go into the harvest field.

As it turned out, the mission staff in Japan was doubled during the years 1962-1964. Ruth and I were part of that. But J. B. Toews had moved on to the seminary presidency by that time. The rest of his letter expressed gratitude for the work of the office staff and discussed details of his travel schedule in India. As far as I know, J. B. Toews did not pursue the legalism and the narrow dispensational

theology of the missionaries that had troubled him during his visits. At least I am not aware of any administrative action that he took to change the ethical and theological orientation of the early missionaries.

Rev. Toews' positive affirmations of the MB church in Japan continued in his evaluation of MB mission work in his later history of the MB church (*Pilgrimage of Faith*, 1993, pp. 261-280). In some MB mission fields (e.g. India and Congo), national church leadership emerged only after the removal of foreign missionaries for political reasons. But, he continued, "Japan is an exception. The Mennonite Brethren Church there is strong and assumes responsibility for evangelism at home and abroad. The late Ruth Wiens, returning from Japan after forty years as a missionary, said: 'Our work in Japan is finished. God has raised up his own people in Japan.'" (271) And, "We need to give thanks to God for the Church in Japan." (279) A few years later, in his personal memoirs, *JB: The Autobiography of a Twentieth Century Pilgrim* (1995), J. B. Toews' enthusiasm for what had been accomplished in Japan continued. In his reflections on the important 1948 MB General Conference, he wrote:

The second major decision was to accept the overture of Mennonite Central Committee to the Mennonite Brethren to accept the responsibility for the postwar relief program in Japan with the intent to make it a stepping stone toward a church planting mission. The 1948 conference thus marked the beginning of *the most effective church-planting program of the Mennonite Brethren in the post-World War II period, the church in Japan.* (Emphasis mine) (143)

Dr. Robert Lee, writing just a few years after the publication of J. B. Toews' books, was not quite so sanguine.

DR. ROBERT LEE: MARCH, 1997

The most comprehensive evaluation of MB mission programs in Japan was done by Dr. Robert Lee in September, 1997. The title of his report is "Mission in a New Era: MBM/S Japan Evaluation."

Dr. Lee brought to the project a most unique personal history. Robert Lee was born in 1928 into a Chinese immigrant family in Portland, Oregon. He was converted to Christian faith in a Mennonite (MC) city mission church near the Lee

family home. He graduated from Oregon State University (electrical engineering) and was appointed to a responsible and well-paying position with the U. S. Government. But he resigned from this position in order to serve the church, first with the MCC in Europe (1951–1953) and then in Korea (1953–1956). After graduating from what became the AMBS and marrying Nancy Burkholder (who was teaching at Goshen College at that time), the family served in Japan as Mennonite (MC) missionaries from 1959 to 1964. Robert Lee pastored MC churches and taught in the MC Bible School program in Hokkaido. After receiving his Ph.D. in the study of religion from Harvard University, where he studied under some of the most eminent scholars of that day, he spent 16 years teaching in some of the fine colleges in the U.S. Dr. Lee and his wife returned to Japan in 1986, again as MC missionaries. His assignment this time was to do research. During the next seventeen years, Dr. Lee assisted in the work of the Tokyo Anabaptist Center and the Tokyo Area Fellowship of Mennonite Churches (TAFMC). But his main position was as professor in the Tokyo Biblical Seminary (Holiness). He was one of the founders of the Tokyo Missiological Research Institute (TMRI) that was associated with the seminary and he also taught courses under the umbrella of the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). He was instrumental in arranging for visits by several leading North American Anabaptist scholars such as Myron and Esther Augsburger, Howard Zehr and Alan and Eleanor Kreider to lecture in Japan and he was delighted to find a great deal of openness to Anabaptist teachings. Dr. Lee fully retired in 2006 and he passed away in 2016.

Dr. Lee thus brought to his MBM/S assignment great familiarity with the social and religious situation in Japan and beyond, both within the larger Christian community and the surrounding culture and society. He did extensive studies in Buddhism at Harvard University and elsewhere. He also brought with him the conviction, shared by almost all social scientists, that the behavior of individuals and the activities of institutions are always shaped by their social and cultural context. So his report does not simply describe the specific situation of the MB mission in Japan in 1997. He reviewed the history and the larger social context of the MB mission and denomination in Japan. That larger context included big issues such as post-modernity, post-Christendom and globalization. One of Lee's long-time interests was the contextualization of the Christian gospel in Japanese

culture. His approach was more theoretical than practical. It was more diagnostic than prescriptive. There was nothing simple about what he had to say. In the words of MBM/S administrator, Harold Ens, “I found this evaluation report to be quite difficult reading.” (Letter to David Dyck, September 29, 1997)

In the introduction to his 34 page (plus three Appendices) report on MB missions in Japan, Dr. Lee listed six areas that he intended to address, but the outline of his report does not follow these points, so I have used my own outline to summarize what I understand to be the major topics that Dr. Lee addressed in his report. His report utilizes concepts from the social sciences, theology, and missiology to analyze the situation of the MB mission in 1997.

### Downsizing.

First, the basic reality of the MB mission in Japan at that time was downsizing. The only long-term MB missionaries in Japan in 1997 were the Laurence Hiebert family. This was down from the peak size of the MB missionary staff of 12 households (nine families and three single women) in the mid-1960s. By the mid-1990s, all of the original six long-time MB missionary households had retired and the six units who had arrived during the 1960s had also all left Japan. The MB mission no longer had legal status in Japan as a *shuukyou-houjin* (religious entity).

Downsizing was by no means unique to the MB mission in Japan. Virtually every mission organization followed the same course, for the same variety of reasons. Japan had become a prosperous nation, which meant that the financial costs of doing mission work in Japan had increased dramatically. Few mission organizations could afford to keep up with inflation in the cost of land and buildings for churches and the cost of living for missionary personnel and their families. Japanese society was changing. Churches were no longer growing at the rate they once were for several reasons: economic prosperity brought with it a decrease in interest in spiritual matters. The “Christian boom” that had followed Japan’s defeat in World War II ended with a new sense of Japanese independence from things western. The rise of the so-called “New Religions” in Japan and the radical actions of groups like *Aum Shinrikyou* (sarin gas attack in a Tokyo subway) produced negative publicity that tainted the reputations of anything associated with “religion.” Globalization brought changes not only in the economy but in patterns of thought and social relationships. Old ways of thinking about missions

changed, too. All of these factors, and others, combined to produce the downsizing that was experienced by the MB mission along with almost every other mission organization in Japan.

Downsizing of MB missionary personnel was not unique to Japan. The number of MB missionaries world-wide peaked during the 1960s when the mission board supported 240 long-term missionaries. But by 1990 that number was down to 125 and, in 1997, at the time of the Lee report, there were only 52 long-term MB missionaries on the various fields. Financial contributions were also down. What was happening instead was increasing numbers of short-term mission trips and shorter terms of service of various types.

#### Japanese Context and MB Church Growth

Second, Robert Lee provided an analysis of the Japanese social and cultural context that helped to account for the early growth of the MB church in Japan. First, the decision to center their efforts in an urban rather than a rural area proved to be crucial to the numerical success of the MB mission. Early in their work in their various rural areas (MC in Hokkaido, GC in Kyushu, BIC in Yamaguchi-Prefecture), the other Mennonite mission groups were the victims of the massive shift of population from the country to the city that took place during the 1950s and 1960s. Young people, especially, including converts to Christianity, left their villages, families, and churches for new opportunities in the cities. The MBs not only did not face this problem but they benefitted from the arrival of students and others from the countryside who were open to the gospel and to the new opportunities for community that they found in the Christian churches.

Since the early MB congregations were clustered in proximity in a single urban area, it was easy for church leaders to gather for meetings. This contributed to the cohesion that characterized the MB community in Japan.

Japanese history reveals a pattern of periodic swings (like a pendulum, Robert Bellah said) between times of openness to outside influences followed by periods of reaction against things foreign. Church expansion and decline parallel these changes in attitude toward the place of foreign influences in Japanese identity. Christianity grew during the “Catholic Century” (1549–1650) but then virtually disappeared under the repressive policies of the Tokugawa Shoguns. The church again grew during the early years of the Meiji Period (1868–1912) of openness to

western ideas and institutions, but went into decline following the proclamation of the reactionary Meiji Constitution (1889) and Imperial Rescript on Education (1890). Christianity in Japan recovered somewhat under the more “liberal” policies of the Taisho Period (1912–1926) but suffered considerable repression under the military government that led the country into World War II and final defeat in 1945. Then followed a new period of openness to the west, including the “Christian boom” from which the early Mennonite missions (MBs included) still benefitted during their early years of service in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s. The MBs were more successful than many other mission groups during the early years of growth, but that era was gone by the mid-1990s and few scholars expected to see an early return to the previous patterns of church growth in Japan. Social, economic, and cultural conditions in Japan had changed, and so had conditions in the churches.

#### Japanese MB Identity

Third, Robert Lee explained some of the factors that led to the tightly integrated identity of the JMBC. I have already mentioned the importance of centering the work in a single geographic area, in and around the city of Osaka. This is one reason that the MBs were able to establish and maintain a tighter “polity” than the other Mennonite groups in Japan. Lee repeatedly commented on the importance of theological education in accounting for the tightly knit MB community. First the Bible Institute, then OBS, and, finally, the Evangelical Biblical Seminary (EBS) produced MB leaders who shared a common educational experience and carried with them similar theological convictions.

The theological orientation of the JMBC was “MB and evangelistic but not Anabaptist.” (6). The singular MB emphasis on evangelism set them apart from other Mennonite and evangelical communities in Japan. Lee noted that the MBs were reluctant participants in inter-Mennonite activities, joining in only when the focus was on evangelism, and he commented that when MB names were mentioned for possible leadership positions in the larger evangelical organizations in Japan (e.g. the Japan Evangelical Association, JEA), MBs received little consideration because of their narrow focus on evangelism.

Japanese MB commitment to dispensational theology also contributed to both their integration as a tightly knit Christian community and their distance from

other Christian communities in Japan. Lee commented that dispensational theology and the expectation of an imminent rapture provided motivation for enthusiastic evangelistic action but not for concerns about the society around them.

As an example of this close linkage between pre-millennial eschatology, passion for the salvation of souls, and a narrow understanding of the role of the missionary, I will cite the closing sentences in a June 12, 1967 letter from missionary Roland Wiens to MB Mission Administrator J. H. Epp explaining why Rev. Wiens could not support Ruth's and my proposal to engage in a self-supporting, tent-maker ministry in Japan.

We are living in the last days. It is no time to make Christianity attractive, intellectually palatable or philosophically acceptable. We need to be strengthened with MIGHT in the inner man by the Holy Spirit to battle Satan and all his demonic hordes, and set the captives free through Jesus' blood and in his mighty Name. We need men with burning hearts who know the will and word of God and DO it

Sociologist Lee noted that "Group integration and group exclusiveness are often correlated." (6) One of the issues that the JMBC will need to address as they move into their future, he wrote, is how they will incorporate relationships with other Mennonite and evangelical communities into their own sense of identity as MBs. "The MB Mission and the Japanese MB church will need to decide if its future should remain narrowly focused upon its own denomination in Japan and abroad or to broaden its identity to participate in the larger evangelical movement and/or the Anabaptist movement in Japan." (32)

### Changing Mission Paradigms

Behind the current (in 1997) situation of the MB mission and church in Japan were changing mission paradigms. Lee summarized these changes by citing the work of Mennonite (MC and MCUSA) and Fuller Theological Seminary missiologist, Wilbert Shenk, in an essay, *Korekara nihon no senkyo* ("The Future of Mission in Japan") that was published by the TMRI, Vol. II, 1994.

The first model that was utilized in the mission programs of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was *Replication*. The mission task, it was generally assumed, was to



transplant the theology and practices of western “Christendom” to other lands. “The underlying assumption was that the truth of the gospel was delivered from western civilization to heathendom. Hence, the ‘superior’ truth and values, in today’s language, were reified. All traffic of knowledge was unidirectional, from the West to the East.” (18)

The Replication approach was carried to Japan by all missionaries, Mennonite, evangelical and ecumenical. Its influence continues on today, Lee wrote, in two forms: First, theology. “The reification of the understanding of the gospel remains.., especially in such theological ideas as medieval atonement theories, Augustinian concepts of sin and guilt, and the Constantinian synthesis of church and state.” (ibid.) It might be noted that all of these notions have been called into question in recent biblical scholarship, including in the writings of MB biblical theologians such as Dr. Mark Baker (atonement theories) and Dr. John E. Toews (original sin).

A second form in which Lee sees the legacy of the Replication model being carried on is in the “mission society” approach of “differentiation and independence from the indigenous church. When the mission task is sharply differentiated, ideas of partnership begin to lose their meaning.” As was the case in many evangelical mission organizations, “Integration” of foreign mission personnel and projects into the structures of the JMBC was resisted by early MB missionaries. This, according to Lee, is a residual of the old Replication approach to mission.

A second, somewhat more enlightened stage in the development of Christian mission that began around 1850 was *Indigenization*, or “Three-self principles.”

‘The indigenization process expects to reproduce Christendom in another culture by drawing on the people and material of the other culture, but the script is provided from outside. This approach attempts to make adjustments to the new culture but essentially does this by changing the cast of characters without rewriting the script. The missionary is the primary agent for deploying and managing all the resources.’ (Shenk) In other terms, indigenization meant indigenous people preaching in their native language and using their own money; however, the church structure and theology remained a clone or replica of the home church. (19)

According to Lee, all of the post-war Mennonite missions in Japan adopted some version of the Indigenization approach to mission. The Mennonite missionaries did not build mission “stations” or “compounds,” but they “planted churches,” and then the goal was to step aside and turn over leadership to native pastors. “Hence, the proper role of the missionary was to stand external to the growth process of the indigenous church.” With the depreciation of the dollar and the rising competence of Japanese leaders,

The missionaries who stood outside the indigenous process now discovered that they had worked themselves out of a job for which they have spent a lifetime preparing, had lost the ability to mobilize material resources, and had been found deficient in language fluency when compared to the newly trained leaders... Furthermore, in Japan the role of the missionary as an outsider is reinforced by the Japanese notion, accepted by the missionaries, that the two are culturally incompatible and, hence, incapable of working together in any meaningful partnership or team sense. (ibid.)

The third stage in the development of Christian mission is *Contextualization*: “A process whereby the gospel message encounters a particular culture, calling forth and leading to the formation of a faith community which is culturally authentic and authentically Christian. Control of the process resides within the context rather than with an external agent or agency.” (Shenk) (20) According to Lee, the Mennonites, along with many other missionaries in Japan, have not done a good job of contextualizing the gospel. They have, instead, created “a people alienated from their own culture.” (20) Missionaries taught a doctrine of sin and guilt, a theology of atonement, and ideas of relationships between church and state that came from the West. “In short, the western Christian heritage inherited by Japanese Christians has not helped resolve their self-identity crises, but rather has alienated them from their own society.” (21)

Lee was optimistic that Anabaptism can help to provide a new theological approach that will further the process of contextualization in Japan in a way that traditional western theologies cannot.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective has become the most viable option for evangelicals, seeking a holistic gospel in Japan both in terms of comprehensiveness, such as integrating peace and social concern with

evangelism, and in offering a corrective, alternative theology to that of Christendom, that is, a theology sufficiently biblical to begin serious contextualization of the gospel in Japanese culture and society. (22)

Robert Lee commented several times that the leaders of the JMBC did not seem to be aware of these fundamental changes in approaches to Christian mission.

### Partnership and Contextualization

Contextualization involves a new *process* more than a new program, or even a new package of programs. The new process requires new structures to facilitate its happening. As mentioned previously, *partnership* is a widely used metaphor for what the process of contextualization might look like. But partnership is difficult to define and it is even more difficult to achieve. It is easier to say what partnership is *not* than to specify what it *is*. But there are positive implications implicit in what Lee said partnership is not.

Partnership cannot be based on the rigid, dogmatic “reified” theologies of western Christendom. Real partnership will require openness to alternative understandings of the literary and cultural contexts in which the biblical texts were composed and it will also require critical analyses of the historical contexts in which western theologies were constructed. These processes can be facilitated by open dialog between partners from diverse cultural backgrounds. This cannot be done in the old one-way, top-down approach to mission:

The old paradigm was based on a romanticized version of the Great Commission that saw the missionary hero going across the seas to give his life in the service of Christ in a pagan land. That model assumed a unidirectional flow of the truth from Christendom to heathendom. The missionary purpose was to clone the success of the West, to establish a self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating church. In contrast the post-Christendom model (as in the *Global Mission Guidelines*) uses the language of globalization and partnership. In missiological terms globalization means that mission is not limited to overseas mission but is everywhere in a post-Christian era. Partnership means working with Christians and churches in some collegial sense. (12-13)

In his reading of the then-current *Global Mission Guidelines* and other policy statements of MBM/S, Lee saw language that reflected “an enlightened view of the modern missionary paradigm,” and “a post-Christendom and post-modern perspective,” but he said, “I have no idea how much of the new language reflects a ‘paradigm shift’ or is the use or misuse of contemporary missiological jargon.” (13).

The old indigenization approach did not involve a true partnership because it assumed a sharp differentiation: Missionaries planted churches and national pastors provided the follow-up pastoral leadership. He noted two problems with this approach. First, he said that there was a consensus in the missionary community in Japan that missionaries were no longer as effective as church planters as they had been during the earlier post-war “Christian boom” when Japanese society was more enamored with things western. That is one reason that recent JMBC ten year plans were not more effective. The plans relied too heavily on mission personnel and funds to accomplish their goals. A second, more fundamental problem was that

We failed to understand that we mutually needed each other in order to become reconciled into the fellowship of the gospel, that is, in a global partnership... This means that we will each need to learn, discover, or create the necessary tools for communicative action. For the missionary it will mean not only adequate language study but becoming bi-cultural by learning how Japanese act, think and make decisions. For the Japanese, they will need to find ways to integrate the missionary into the system and at the same time allow freedom of innovation. (23)

Lee noted that there are two models of “integration. One (“mechanical solidarity”) is based on similarity, or homogeneity. “Birds of a feather flock together.” But that is not what Lee had in mind. He did not intend that the missionary needs to become Japanese, nor that the Japanese should become westerners. The other approach to integration (“organic solidarity”) is based on mutual interdependence, or complementary differences. We need each other because we know that each partner has needs that can be fulfilled only by the other and each has particular gifts to share with the other. The Bible uses the analogy of the different organs in an organism. (25) The body can only be healthy

when each part makes its own unique contribution to the health of the whole. That is the kind of integrated partnership that Lee had in mind.

Lee also used the metaphor of friendship to illustrate what he meant by partnership.

Partnership requires at least two partners who enjoy each other's company, find each other mutually useful, and share a common cause. (Note: Lee cited this as a very ancient definition of the nature of "friendship.") MB missionary partnership in Japan then should describe the relationship between sending and receiving church, in which the two find that Christian fellowship (*koinonia*) requires mutual interdependence to fulfil a common task. In short, missionary partnership can be completed only with the interest, cooperation and commitment of the receiving church. (26-27)

Partnership cannot be realized as long as relationships conform to the traditional patterns of vertical, hierarchical relationships to which both missionaries and Japanese pastors had become accustomed. Lee cited the case of Laurence Hiebert, who, at the time, was a new and still young MB missionary. When Lee suggested that an experienced Japanese pastor might serve as a mentor to Hiebert, the surprised response was that it had always been the other way around. Missionaries mentored Japanese.

Lee did not have much to say in his report about the Japanese side of the partnership, but he did mention that Japanese individuals and organizations have often been generous in their support of relief efforts and in joint international endeavors, so he was optimistic that the Japanese MBs would be similarly generous in doing their part in the financial support of any future partnership ventures. He also commented that models of church life needed to be developed that did not involve the huge expenditures of funds for land and buildings that were required in Japan. And he mentioned that some Holiness churches were shifting their focus from attracting new people to retaining the people who were already part of the church community. A variety of smaller group activities was part of that effort.

He did have some suggestions for how the missionary side of the partnership could be strengthened. There needed to be enough missionary staff to create a

“critical mass.” A single missionary household (the Hieberts) was not enough. Others needed to be sent, but on a schedule that would not result in everyone retiring at the same time, as had happened with the original contingent of MB missionaries in Japan.

Lee also made a suggestion that is reminiscent of the plea made by Rev. Kitano more than forty years earlier: The North American MBs should share with the Japanese church a mature and experienced pastor/denominational leader to assist over a period of several years in the development of the MB denomination in Japan. Lee’s specific suggestion was:

Surely in the MB church there is an established scholar who would be willing to give 10-15 years of his/her career to learn the Japanese language and to teach in the seminary. That person should have an earned doctorate in a theological field, preferably related to Anabaptist studies, so that he/she can also teach in the AGST/J program in Osaka and Kobe. (32)

As far as I know, these suggestions were never acted upon. Mission resources were directed elsewhere.

Of course Lee mentioned a host of other matters, but a concluding “Miscellany Checklist” (31) included the following: He was skeptical about “campus ministry,” which had become difficult. Senior citizens might be a target group for ministry. Self-employed missionaries can be helpful but they tend to become overly busy in their work places. He was “ambiguous” about English teaching as “pre-evangelism.” “Most missions, including MBM (MC), but not the mission-society types, have decided that English teaching is no longer a legitimate missiological activity.” (33) If it is continued, the teachers need better orientation; they need expertise in teaching English as a second language; and English programs in churches should be viewed more as “community service” than as “pre-evangelism.” And, “In Japan Christian women, who make up the majority of the church members, remain the invisible person, especially the pastor’s wife.” (29) Of course women make many contributions in the life of the church, but not in pastoral leadership in MB churches.

Did these (and other) administrative visits and evaluative reports make any real difference? The J. B. Toews visits in 1957 and 1961 were undoubtedly a factor in the doubling of the missionary staff in Japan during the years 1962-1964. It is not

so easy to report on the practical outcomes of the Lee evaluation. I could not find any specific actions in the minutes of the meetings of the MBM/S Board following their receipt of the report, but I did locate three documents that were written by mission administrators. First, on September 29, 1997, MBM/S Executive Secretary Harold Ens sent a two page response to David Dyck, who was the administrator for Asia at that time. On October 1, 1997, David Dyck wrote an “Initial Response to Lee Evaluation of MBM/S Ministry in Japan,” and on December 29, 1997 Dyck sent “Recommendations to the Board of MBM/S” to Harold Ens and Laurence Hiebert in Japan. I will summarize several of the major themes that these documents have in common.

First, the Lee evaluation was quite different from previous reports. Since he was a sociologist, he provided an extensive analysis of the social, cultural, economic, and religious contexts in which the MB mission operated in Japan. Both men expressed appreciation for this, even though Lee’s sociological approach was difficult to comprehend. Both expressed gratitude for the JMBC that had grown out of MB mission work. “Our pioneers did some things right and that needs to be acknowledged.” (Dyck, October 1, 1997) Both agreed that an era of mission work had ended and there was no going back. The way forward was through partnership and integration of MB mission work into the JMBC. Both agreed that the mission board would need to decide how to prioritize work in Japan relative to other fields in Asia and elsewhere. The mission board would also need to prioritize, in consultation with the JMBC, the assignments of any future mission staff in Japan. Would the Board send more long-term missionaries to join the Hieberts? Should they send self-supporting, “tent-maker” missionaries? Should they send more English teachers? Lee said that there was no longer “missiological justification” for sending short-term English teachers to serve in churches in Japan, but, in one report, JMBC pastors asked for 18 more English teachers. How should the mission board respond? There are repeated references to the idea that had been discussed over a period of many years that the MB seminary in Japan would welcome more teachers from North America. Ens commented that many of these issues should be addressed by the JMBC, not decided by the mission board in North America.

Of course Ens and Dyck commented on some of the concerns that had been raised by Dr. Lee. The theological position of the early MBM/S missionaries in

Japan and the JMBC was one such concern. “I found it especially ironical that the MBM/S, the only Mennonite agency assuming a work and field which were the direct consequence of the post WW II work of MCC, chose to deliberately define themselves as non-Anabaptist.” (Dyck, December, 1997). Dyck also wondered about the “theological commonality” of MBM/S and the JMBC. “What do we do about our historical theological direction as a mission agency and the theological orientation of the MB church in Japan today?” Ens commented on these same issues:

He (Lee) points out that Japan MB’s see themselves as MB and evangelical but not Anabaptist. From my perspective, that would appear to parallel well with the missionaries we sent to Japan and even with the current viewpoint of many MB’s in North America. My question would be, what, if anything, should MBM/S do about that at this juncture?

Dyck wondered about the implications for church planting if the MBs in Japan were as “alienated from their own culture” as Lee said. Could MBM/S and the JMBC work together on such issues? Dyck also expressed some disappointment that the JMBC had not given more attention to the Lee report, and to a “New Vision for Japan” document that Laurence Hiebert had written. As Lee said, JMBC leaders did not seem to be aware of the missiological issues that were being discussed at that time.

MBBS professor and MBM/S board member Dr. Delores Friesen visited Japan with MBM/S administrator David Dyck in 1997, just at the time Lee was doing his evaluation, and then again in 2002, this time with MBM/S board chair Dennis Fast (and wife, Connie) and the Asia administrator, Dr. Tim Bergdahl. In 2002, Dr. Friesen was delighted to report that she sensed that some very significant changes had happened during the five year interim. Dr. Manabe, pastor of the Ishibashi MB Church and the president of the MB Evangelical Biblical Seminary), agreed with the Lee report that an old era of missionary work had passed, a new era had begun and a new kind of partnership was needed. Among many other things, Dr. Friesen wrote: “JMBC is changing. Younger leaders have a variety of ways of working in the church. Other voices are beginning to be heard.”

JMBC pastor Jun’ichi Fujino listed several recent changes in the JMBC in his 2015 report (Wiens, ed., 210-211): The report of the “Renewal Committee” in 2006; the



adoption of a new JMBC Confession of Faith in 2016; a transition from decision-making that was centered in the JMBC to much greater local congregational autonomy; and a new openness to women in church ministries. All of these changes were products of the work of the JMBC itself, with little or no input from MB missionaries from North America. Randall and Sachiko Thiessen had left Japan in 2002, after only five years of service (1997-2002), leaving only Laurence and Leona Hiebert as long-term missionaries in Japan, and the Hieberts were located in Toyota Higashi (East) City, far removed from the center of JMBC activities in Osaka, and largely disconnected from the organizational structures of the Conference. Legacies from the past remained, but the day of direct mission influence in the life of the JMBC were long gone. Analyses of internal changes in the JMBC will have to wait for someone else to do, as will reports on the recent work of MBM/S and MBM (most recently “Multiply”) in Japan and elsewhere during the years since the beginning of this new millennium.

I will conclude these summaries of reviews and evaluations of MB mission work in Japan with a few additional comments on “contextualization” from a brief autobiography written by Dr. C. Norman Kraus (1924-2018) in *Making Sense of the Journey*, 2007. For 30 years Dr. Kraus was professor of theology at Goshen College (Indiana) of the MC and MCUSA, but he taught in many other places, too, including India and other countries in Asia. What makes him relevant to this project is the fact that in 1980 Dr. Kraus resigned from his position in the faculty at Goshen College to move to Japan as an MC missionary. He taught and wrote in Hokkaido for seven years before his return to Indiana in 1987 and then retirement in Virginia where he continued his writing projects. He did not go to Japan to plant new churches, he wrote, but to “nurture churches that were just coming of age.” He also wanted to write an Anabaptist theology that did not simply repeat what Western theologians had been writing for so many years that western theology had become “incestuous.” He wanted to formulate a theology that would speak to the new post-modern, post-Christendom culture that was emerging in the twentieth century. Writing a theology that would fit the Japanese situation could be part of that. In 2007, ten years after the Lee report, Dr. Kraus wrote about his work in Japan:

What our Japanese churches needed, it seemed to me, was a critical analysis of western theology based on an indigenous contextual

interpretation of Scripture. After all, the scriptural narratives were not configured in the pattern of Greek dualistic categories. Indeed, there are aspects of Japanese tradition that are nearer to the ancient Hebrew culture than to modern Western culture. I felt that the Japanese should be free to understand Jesus as a full expression of the Divine reality without necessarily formulating it in the Platonic form of Trinity and, further to explain the atonement in terms of their own shame culture rather than the legal guilt culture of the West. They needed to understand and interpret God in the context of Shinto divine naturalism or Buddhist mystical humanism rather than in terms of Greek dualism and transcendence. One church leader put it succinctly when he told me. “We know what the missionaries taught us, but to speak frankly it does not make good sense to us.” And again he commented to me that for him with his Buddhist background, “Jesus gets in the way of God.” It was with this challenge ringing in my ears that I taught and wrote for seven years in Japan until the summer of 1987. (36)

If it is important to contextualize our understandings of Christian faith and life in ways that are meaningful in Japanese culture and society, then it is equally important that we learn to understand the teachings of the Scriptures in ways that speak “Good News” to the emerging post-modern, post-Christendom, post-religious world that now surrounds us. To accomplish this, we will need each other. We will need to find new and better ways to be partners, friends, and brothers and sisters as fellow children of God and followers of Jesus.

### 13. MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL: CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

There are many criteria by which the results of seventy years of MB mission work in Japan might be measured and evaluated. One marker of missionary success might be the number of souls saved. That might have been *the*, or at least one of the primary goals of the early “Salvationist” missionaries, MBs included, in Japan and in many other places. But, of course the fate of souls is not something that is visible for us to see. The number of souls saved is not something that is available to us to count, and that is just as well. Judgements about the status of souls is best left to the just and loving God.

### COMMUNITY

But one product of MB mission work in Japan that is clear for all to see is the community of people that has come into existence, initially as a result of the work of the missionaries. A collection of assorted individuals has been drawn together into a new community. In the words of the author of I Peter, “Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people: once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (2:10, RSV) The New Testament writers used many metaphors for this new Christian community: peoplehood, kingdom, body, family, building, organism, etc. It is the nature of the Christian *community* that resulted from the work of the early MB missionaries that will be the focus of these concluding comments.

Many outside observers have commented on the sense of community that they experience when they visit the people and congregations of the JMBC. These warm relationships clearly extend across many national and cultural boundaries. As just one example of what many other foreign visitors have reported, I will cite one brief quotation from the report of MB mission board member and MBBS faculty member, Dr. Delores Friesen, after her second visit to the JMBC in March 2002: “The gracious and beautiful hospitality is something I will never forget. The genuine love and kindness, the generosity, and the delight with which it was given is a real witness to the Gospel and to a growing partnership.” Almost every foreign visitor to JMBC congregations leaves with impressions such as this.

I will cite only one incident from my own experience that illustrates the unusual quality of relationships within the MB community in Japan. I was eating lunch around a low table after the worship service in one of the JMBC congregations (a wonderful tradition!). Also at the table were the pastor’s wife with a small child, some high school students, and an elderly Japanese medical doctor who was experiencing church life for the first time. The medical doctor, who was not yet a Christian, suddenly commented with a sense of surprise: “There is no other place in all of Japanese society where a group like this would be together around one table: many ages, females and males, Japanese and a foreigner, all eating together. This could not happen anywhere else in Japan.” Breaking down walls, removing barriers, joining together strangers and even enemies, bringing peace and reconciliation are part of what the good news of the Christian gospel is all about (Ephesians 2:11-22). In the words of a poem, and later hymn, written for the London Missionary Society in 1908 by John Oxenham:

In Christ there is no east and west, in Him no north and south,  
But one great fellowship of love, throughout the whole wide earth.

I am quite sure that in 1908 it was generally assumed that this “one great fellowship of love” would be achieved by others becoming like Europeans and Americans, but that is no longer the case. I think we know by now that persons of different cultures can become friends, siblings and partners without becoming clones of one another. Sometimes we have actually experienced this within the JMBC and between the JMBC and those of us who are “outsiders” from the West.

Of course there is nothing simple or automatic about creating and sustaining relationships of friendship and partnership. That is as true within the Christian community as it is within any collection of individuals into a group. Community-building takes work. And even good communities have their dark sides. Christian communities, like Christian individuals, contain their “treasures in earthen vessels.” (II Corinthians 4:7) We human beings rarely get everything right.

Having said that, how can we account for the strong communal relationships that have characterized the JMBC since its beginnings? I will review some of the sociological factors, the “earthen vessels,” that have helped to make this possible. The importance of proximity in the larger Osaka area, and Ishibashi in particular, during the formative early years cannot be overemphasized. Proximity helped to make possible the tight organizational structures that Dr. Lee said characterized “MB polity.” A narrow fundamentalist and dispensational theology provided an early foundation for and definition of the boundaries around the community. The fact that JMBC leaders shared the common experience of studying in schools that were exclusively MB (MBBI and EBS), or dominated by MB teachers (OBS), was surely an important contributing factor. Even holding the “liberals,” “modernists” and “neo-orthodox” as common adversaries helped to clarify identity within the MB community. Willingness to live in separation from fellow Mennonites, from other evangelicals, and from other Christians in Japan contributed to strong bonds within the MB community. Strong missionary and Japanese leaders such as Dr. Harry Friesen, Rev. Kitano and pastor Arita helped to define the center of MB identity in Japan. It should also be noted that the numbers of members within the congregations, and even within the JMBC as a whole, were small enough that many of the members of the various congregations knew each other well—and as

was often the case in MB communities in Russia and North America, they were sometimes connected by ties of kinship and marriage. Gathering for radio rallies and prayer meetings in Osaka and for special events on the Nosegawa Campsite provided opportunities for fellowship across the barriers of location and age. Information shared in a denominational paper (*Yokiotozure*) also helped to solidify what it meant to be MB. The admirable practice of sharing a simple lunch after Sunday morning worship services provided regular opportunities for informal, face-to-face interaction. All of this, and more, formed the sociological mechanisms, or the “carriers” (the “earthen vessels”) for a strong Japanese MB communal identity.

## DARK SIDES

But there are dark sides to the “earthen vessels” that provide strong internal group cohesiveness. As Dr. Lee and other sociologists have pointed out, tightly knit communities face a dilemma: Internal cohesiveness is often accompanied by internal rigidity and tight boundaries. Close communities are likely to have little tolerance for internal diversity and they are often resistant to change. Their tight boundaries make it difficult for outsiders to enter the group. I think this dark side of intense community solidarity is as apparent in the histories of both the MB mission in Japan and in the JMBC as it has been in the larger Mennonite world. Commitments to a Godly life-style can easily become the legalism that J. B. Toews noted in his report and that Rev. Fujino noted in his (in Wiens, ed., 2015, p. 207). Commitment to a rigid theological system such as the dispensationalism that was taught by the early MB missionaries can, indeed, provide a foundation for group solidarity but it can also make cooperation with outsiders impossible (as in the case of OBS) and can lead to a prideful inflexibility. In the opinion of Rev. Kitano, some of the MB missionaries were “too sincere.” They had little capacity for the self-reflection and mutual criticism that can lead to self-improvement. Rev. Fujino also noted that sometimes members of the JMBC thought of themselves as superior to other Christians (ibid., p. 207). An education system that includes extensive “indoctrination” often results in a taken-for-granted, commonsense, “of-course” mindset that makes openness to diversity and change difficult.

I know that the reasons and circumstances are always complicated and vary from situation to situation, but the tightly knit relationships within the community

probably contributed to the drop-out rate that plagued the MBs in the early years. On the missionary side, a few of the earliest MB missionaries had to leave Japan for health reasons, while all of the others of the “founding” generation stayed for more than three decades, until retirement. But the later missionary arrivals did not stay nearly so long. I know that in some cases, at least, people left because they could not fit into the rigid system that had been constructed on the mission “field” in Japan. I was troubled to note that three of the original four pastors of JMBC congregations left the denomination (Kurita, Kadota, and Sato) and I know that several other pastors also left. J. B. Toews reported that as early as 1957 the MBs had baptized a total of 155 persons, but more than one third of these had already been “excommunicated.” These are some of the costs that come with communal solidarity.

## CHANGE

It is my impression that the JMBC has moved well beyond the narrow and rigid constraints of the early years. These impressions were confirmed by Rev. Fujino’s list of recent changes in the JMBC: (1) Local congregations are now more responsible for their own affairs rather than dependent on the JMBC for direction, and there is a new openness to diversity between congregations; (2) A new Confession of Faith has been adopted that is based on the more open and Anabaptist ICOMB COF rather than on fundamentalism and dispensationalism; (3) Congregations now call their own pastors rather than relying on a JMBC committee to make assignments; and (4) There is a new openness to a stronger role for women in church leadership. (ibid, p. 210-211)

There are undoubtedly reasons for these changes that are internal to the JMBC, but contacts with the larger MB world have also surely played a role. I will list some of the many opportunities for creating relationships across national and cultural boundaries: At least six JMBC pastors (most with their families) have studied in the MB seminary in Fresno, and other Japanese MB students have attended MB schools in Canada and the U.S. Periodic visits from MB mission board members and administrators provided for intense conversations that lasted over a period of several days or weeks. Participation in the meetings and activities of ICOMB has created linkages with the global MB world. Occasional fraternal visits to Japan by MB leaders such as pastors Marvin Hein and Vern Heidebrecht,

MB professors Frank C. Peters, Edmund Janzen and Dalton Reimer and others have influenced thoughts and practices on all sides. And there have been formal (e.g. JMBC groups attending MB conventions in North America) and informal visits to MB churches in North America. Short-term English teachers and mission teams established relationships of friendship and mutual exchange. These and other points of contact provide opportunities for influences that run in both directions. I am afraid, though, that for too long the assumption has been that we parental MBs in the west will paternalistically influence our dependent spiritual children in other parts of the world more than they will influence us. Perhaps the day will come when we will share equally as true spiritual siblings, friends and partners.

## DIVIDING WALLS

But there are many barriers that continue to separate and divide, even within the small MB community. In North America, Canadian and U.S. MBs have found it difficult to stay together. The two national conferences separated in the year 2000 and the two conferences have moved in somewhat different directions since that separation. Especially in Canada, the poorer and less well educated immigrants from Russia who arrived before the communist revolution (the *Kanadier*) differed from the wealthier, more highly educated and sophisticated later arrivals (*Russlanders*). There are theological differences between MB adherents of Anabaptism and other MBs who are convinced fundamentalists, dispensationalists, and mainline evangelicals (including the nationalistic patriotism that often seems to be part of what it means to be an American evangelical). Rural-urban, class, occupational, gender and generational differences are all walls that divide. On a global scale, the differences are even more dramatic. What do a charismatic congregation in Brazil, a group of villagers meeting under a thatched roof in Congo, an audience listening to a symphony orchestra and chorus perform the “Mennonite Concerto” in a concert hall in Winnipeg, Canada, and a group of Japanese MBs eating curry rice together after a worship service have in common? Geography, cultures, worship styles, theologies, worldviews, etc. are all different. What can possibly hold such diverse communities together in an International *Community* of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB)? What can bind together a diverse national denomination or even a local congregation where there are many internal differences? The walls that divide are many and they are formidable.

## SHARED MEMORY

Sociologists such as Robert Bellah and MCUSA sociologist Donald Kraybill have pointed out that a shared historical memory can contribute to a sense of common peoplehood that transcends social and cultural differences. So MBs in Japan, North America and elsewhere might not speak the same language, eat the same foods, worship in the same manner, or hold the same theological convictions, but we do share a common story, and that can provide the foundation for a sense of spiritual and social kinship. Awareness of a shared spiritual ancestry can help to bind a community together in friendship and partnership.

As was the case with the motley collection of nomadic tribal peoples known as “Hebrews” who became YHWH’s chosen People of Israel, it was their shared memory (their *hielsgeschichte*) that helped to bind them together. It was their shared story of God’s promises to Abram; liberation from slavery in Egypt; wanderings in the wilderness; receipt of the *Torah* (law) from YHWH; and their occupation of a “promised land” that helped to form their identity as a “people” (*ethnos*). The exemplary persons whose stories are recorded in the Old and New Testaments are the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 11 and 12) whom we as Christians are called to remember and to emulate as our spiritual ancestors. In doing so, we become a continuation of a biblical “salvation history” that we share in common.

But we North American Christians are the inheritors of the legacies of many other religious forebears as well: The Christian “fathers” of the early centuries after Jesus; Constantine and the emperors and popes of the “Holy Roman Empire” that he founded; Luther and the other sixteenth century magisterial reformers; the leaders of revival movements like Jonathan Edwards and Billy Graham; nineteenth and twentieth century theologians who adopted “modern” ways of interpreting the Scriptures, and the fundamentalists who opposed them; “Neo-orthodox” theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. And, of course, a host of other more recent theological and cultural fads and movements. We in the West have been shaped by all of this whether we are aware of it or not.

Those of us who are part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have our own particular collection of spiritual heroes and forebears: the Swiss Anabaptists who parted ways from the Zurich reformer, Zwingli, and were subsequently



persecuted by church and state as traitors and “heretics”; Menno Simons, the converted Roman Catholic priest who traveled across northern Europe pastoring underground congregations of peaceful Anabaptists; martyr heroes such as Dirk Willems who rescued his captor from drowning, only to be arrested and executed; the leaders of migrations of Mennonites to Prussia, to southern Russia, and to the Americas; historians like Harold S. Bender and theologians like John Howard Yoder who helped to clarify what it means to think and live with Anabaptist convictions.

Those of us who are Mennonite Brethren share in our own even more specific historical legacy: Eighteen men who experienced a spiritual renewal and signed a document “seceding” from the Mennonite establishment in the Mennonite colonies in Russia; emigres who escaped from difficult circumstances in Russia and traveled across the Atlantic to pioneer new homesteads on the prairies in Canada and the U.S.; the many MBs in North America who became successful farmers, business people, and professionals, contributing some of their financial and other resources to support congregations, schools, and missionaries who traveled to many places around the globe to share their version of the Christian gospel; and thoughtful church leaders such as A. H. Unruh in Canada, P. C. Hiebert in the U.S., and the “patriarch,” J. B. Toews who served the MB church in both countries and around the world. Recognizing that we share a common spiritual ancestry can bind us together as Christian sisters and brothers, in spite of the many barriers that separate us from one another.

That brings us to Japan, where Christians share in other, quite different stories about which we in the West know almost nothing: the legacies of Confucius in China and the Buddha in India; Kuukai, and the Kamakura Buddhist reformers, Hounen, Shinran and Nichiren; the Tokugawa Shoguns; the Meiji, Taisho, Showa, and Heisei Emperors who served as the symbolic heads of the nation as one great sacred extended family (*kokutai*). Japanese Christian leaders such as Kanzou Uchimura (who recognized that his Christian spirituality was partially shaped by Hounen and Shinran); Presbyterian leader Masahisa Uemura; and the Roman Catholic writer, Shusaku Endo are also part of the story. Again, we are shaped by the legacies of our spiritual predecessors whether we are aware of this or not.

For the JMBC, the Anabaptist-Mennonite version of the Christian faith and life was first introduced by the work of the Thielmans and the MCC Relief Center. It was then redefined by the “founding” MB missionaries: Harry Friesen, Roland Wiens, Jonathan Bartel, Sam Krause and their wives, and by Ruth Wiens and Rubena Gunther. MB pastor, teacher and evangelist, Rev. Kyou’ichi Kitano and MB pastor Masaru Arita and others also left their marks.

So whether we are Japanese, Indian, African, European or North American; Christian, Buddhist, or “secular,” how we think and how we live has been influenced and shaped by our many spiritual and cultural forbears. To the extent that we share a common story, we can share a common communal identity. But our stories are not all the same, so our shared memories can divide as well as unite. Sharing in dialog between friends and partners stories that differ can be mutually enriching and enlightening. That is why exchanges across cultural boundaries are so important. We all have needs that must be met and we all have gifts to contribute as diverse “organs” in the great global body of Christ. We should all be thankful that ICOMB now provides one mechanism for accomplishing that.

## FOUNDATIONS

I would like to end this report with the suggestion that when the leaders of the JMBC contemplate which of their many ancestors they wish to emulate, they should celebrate the memory of Rev. Henry G. and Lydia Thielman. The Thielmans were the first MBs to serve in Japan. They and their co-workers in the MCC Center in Kasugade provided a fine example of holistic Christian ministry and service “in the name of Christ.” Of course the good contributions of the early MB missionaries must also be remembered and honored, but in many ways their understanding of the Christian faith and life was narrower, more legalistic, and more isolationist than the more hospitable, inclusive and ecumenical stance that the Thielmans and the MCC Center represented. As mission administrator Harold Ens recognized, that is the kind of missionaries the MB mission Board sent to Japan, and the MB missionaries in Japan were representative of the position of a large portion of the MB population in North America. But the Thielmans demonstrated one particular way of being Christian, Mennonite and MB. It is that more inclusive and holistic understanding of Christian faith and life toward which

the MB mission program has been moving in recent years, and that is the kind of faith and life that ICOMB is encouraging. That is also the direction in which the JMBC has been moving.

Giving greater recognition to Henry and Lydia Thielman and the work of the MCC Center as the initial progenitors of the MB community in Japan might help move all of us in a more spiritually healthy direction. Honoring the Thielmans and the work of the MCC in our history is as important for MBs in North America as it is in Japan. One way to highlight the contribution of the Thielmans and their fellow MCC workers might be to extend the history of MB beginnings in Japan back by one year. MB work in Japan actually began with the arrival of the Thielmans in March, 1949, more than one year before the arrival of Miss Ruth Wiens in August, 1950. Acknowledging 1949 as the beginning of the MB mission in Japan will help us all to remember who we are and will remind us all to find more faithful ways to work together to fulfill our calling as MB “partners in obedience.”

There have been dramatic instances in the history of the MBs in Japan when continuity with this spirit of cooperative service in the name of Christ was again very evident. I will mention three. The four Mennonite missionary and Japanese national communities in Japan (GC, MC, BIC, MB) collaborated in providing relief following disastrous typhoon Ida in Aichi Prefecture in 1958. The Kuwana MB Church, near the city of Nagoya, was one outgrowth from those cooperative relief efforts. JMBC people were active in providing aid following the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1994, and, again, following the devastating earthquake and *tsunami* in Northeast Japan in 2011. Less dramatic but no less important are countless smaller acts of kindness to fellow church members, to family and relatives, and to friends and neighbors near and far. Sometimes these good deeds are best done by individuals, sometimes by local congregations, sometimes by Christian communities cooperating together (e.g. the JMBC and, more broadly, the JEA or with fellow Mennonites) to accomplish what individuals or small groups cannot do alone. Any such deeds of kindness, whether great or small, whether done knowingly or unawares, when done to the “least of these” are done to Jesus. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Finally, it seems to me that one concise way to summarize the story of the Mennonite Brethren in Japan is to recognize that MB/MCC cooperation in the

Relief Center in Osaka represented a unification of evangelicalism and Anabaptism. Verbal proclamation of the gospel and meeting the practical human needs of their neighbors “In the Name of Christ” were woven together into one seamless cloth. That was the true beginning of the MB presence in Japan. The early MB missionaries divided what was initially united as one. Verbal proclamation of the gospel and church planting took priority over almost everything else. The MB mission and the JMBC became “Evangelical but *not* Anabaptist.” It is my impression that the JMBC is restoring that earlier unity: *Both* evangelical *and* Anabaptist. To the extent that that is the case, Henry Thielman is an important “father” of the Mennonite Brethren in Japan. Building on the evangelical Anabaptism of spiritual forbears such as the Thielmans is carrying on the work of the early founders of the MB movement who sought to “restore” the church to resemble more closely what it had been in New Testament times and as it was envisioned by “our beloved” Menno Simons.

Whether or not Henry G. Thielman was familiar with the well-known words of Menno Simons, the spiritual ancestor whose name we bear as Mennonites, the Thielmans’ service in the MCC Center in Osaka demonstrated the kind of Christian and evangelical faith that Menno called for. Insofar as we follow in the path of Menno, we will contribute to the fulfilment of the *missio Dei*, the Mission of God, which is the restoration of *shalom* on this earth.

True evangelical faith is of such a nature it cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love; it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and consoles the sad; it does good to those who do it harm; it serves those that harm it; it prays for those who persecute it; it teaches, admonishes and judges us with the Word of the Lord; it seeks those who are lost; it binds up what is wounded; it heals the sick; it saves what is sound; it becomes all things to all people. The persecution, suffering and anguish that come to it for the sake of the Lord’s truth have become a glorious joy and comfort to it.

## ATTACHMENTS

### 1. FROM THE MARGINS: EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE AUTHOR

As mentioned above, our role in the story of MB missions in Japan was a minor one. Ruth and I have benefitted much from our years of experience in Japan, but we have contributed little. Because all of my various experiences in Japan, and many other experiences in many other places, have shaped the perspective that I bring to this report, I am providing an account of some of these experiences as an Appendix. Perhaps this might help to explain some of the choices that I have made in the preceding pages. My story is also the story of one MB person that represents, in some ways at least, the course over which others in my generation have journeyed in their lives. In many ways, my life is not much different from the lives of others in my generation except that I spent many more years in school and in Japan than my age mates. My story also provides one more perspective on the work of MB missions in Japan.

#### AT HOME IN A MENNONITE COMMUNITY

Like most MBs of my generation, I was born in a small rural town with parents, grandparents and many uncles and aunts and cousins nearby. All of my great-grandparents were born in Russia but only my Enns grandfather migrated from Russia to North America with his family, in 1884, when he was a child. My other grandparents were born in the American mid-west. Many of my relatives on both sides of my family migrated to California from Kansas and Nebraska in the early years of the twentieth century, so both of my parents were born in Reedley, California, where their families had purchased farms. The small farm town (population about 5000 at that time) of Reedley is where I was born on May 7, 1935. My father continued to farm throughout most of his life, but his primary occupation was as a small businessman. He and his brother owned and operated an automobile agency in Reedley.

Like most MB families in that generation, my extended family was very close. In fact, my father and two of his brothers married my mother and two of her sisters, so I met some of the same cousins at family gatherings at both my Enns and Unruh grandparents' homes. During my childhood, family gatherings at our grandparents' homes happened almost every week on Sunday afternoons. As if that was not enough, my mother and her four sisters also gathered one day almost weekly in my Grandmother Unruh's home throughout most of their adult lives. There were business and farming partnerships, shared loans, and exchanges of information about farming and business conditions, since those were the occupations in which almost all of the adult members of both extended families were engaged. All except one of my employers prior to our move away from Reedley were relatives.

All of the adults in my grandparent and parent generation were members of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church, though some of my uncles and aunts eventually moved away to cities such as Los Angeles and San Jose, California. All four of my grandparents were charter members of the Reedley MB Church when it was organized in 1905 and my great-grandfather, Dietrich T Enns was the first lay leader of the congregation, when the church was still small and before there was a paid pastor. (Note: The change from teams of lay and part-time church leaders to hiring full-time salaried pastors did not become widespread in MB churches in North America until the 1930s and 1940s.) My grandparents, my father, my siblings, and many of my uncles and some of my cousins were also active in the leadership of the Reedley MB Church. Many of the employees and customers in my father's business were fellow church members.

In many ways the church was the center of our social life. Our family, like many families in the congregation, attended worship services and Sunday school in the mornings plus a young peoples' activity and another service in the evening almost every Sunday. We also attended a mid-week prayer meeting almost every Wednesday evening. Of course there were other gatherings, too, for weddings and funerals, for Christmas and Easter celebrations, plus other occasional meetings for missionary and other reports. There were weeklong evening "Revival Meetings" at least once a year and we attended weeklong, half-day "Daily Vacation Bible School" classes every summer during my childhood.

The Reedley MB Church was part of a consortium of local MB churches that sponsored the Immanuel Academy high school from which I graduated in 1953. These same congregations also cooperated in the support of the Hartland Christian Camp in the nearby Sierra Nevada Mountains. My relatives were involved in the leadership of both of these institutions and my cousins were my fellow students and my fellow campers. I worked for my grandfather on his farms alongside my cousins.

So I grew up as a member of a very tightly knit MB “ethno-religious community.” There were no clear boundaries between church, family, school, work, and play. Our culture, our social relationships and our religious faith were all bound together like circles in a Venn diagram or organs in one body. I met the same people in almost all of the social institutions in which I was involved: school, work, church, and recreation, and many of these people were also my relatives. If there was a center that held everything together, it was the church.

We also shared a common Dutch-German ethnic culture. Most of us in my generation spoke only a few words of German, but our parents’ first language was German and many of our grandparents spoke English with a German accent. We had a common “historical memory” of religious persecutions and geographic migrations. There were “Mennonite foods” that we enjoyed eating, like *zweibach*, *verenika*, *borscht* and *pluma mousse*. We had a strong sense of group identity. We knew who belonged to our “in-group” and who the “outsiders” were. We called the Anglos who were not part of our community “the English.” Almost all of us married fellow Mennonites. All of this, and more, was what we meant when we talked about “Mennonite community.” Like Irish Catholics, German Jews, Japanese Buddhists and Sikhs from the Punjab, we were one of the many “ethno-religious” immigrant sub-communities in pluralistic American society.

But by the time of my generation, we MBs were rapidly “assimilating” into mainstream American culture and society. Many of us moved away from farming as our primary occupation into various kinds of businesses and professions. We moved from farms and small towns into urban areas. We stayed in school longer. We did not remember much about our Anabaptist-Mennonite history and we stopped preparing ethnic foods. Decreasing numbers of us married fellow Mennonites. Religiously, many MBs abandoned Anabaptist-Mennonite

convictions and were attracted to American fundamentalism and dispensationalism. Increasing numbers of us, and even more of our children and grandchildren, dropped out of church altogether. My life and the life of my family illustrate many of these patterns of change.

## LEAVING HOME

My first real experience of life outside of the Mennonite community that was my original home was when I became a student in the two-year “community college” in Reedley. Few of the 52 members of our graduating class (1953) from Immanuel attended Tabor College, the MB school in Hillsboro, Kansas. I think there were three reasons for this. First, Tabor was half way across the continent. That seemed to be very far away. Second, Tabor was much more expensive than the local community college where we could live at home and tuition was virtually free. Third, there were vague suspicions and rumors that there might be “modernists” teaching at Tabor. It seemed to my family that it would be cheaper and safer to stay closer to home.

As had been my experience in Immanuel, at Reedley College I quickly became involved in many student activities: sports, music, student government, etc. I worked part-time for my father and uncle on their farms and in their business. I drove bus and was a leader for youth activities in a small mission program sponsored by the Reedley MB Church in the nearby town of Selma. As was the case in many parts of American society in the 1950s, and as was true of virtually all of my friends, I was “going steady” with my MB girlfriend. Sometimes I studied.

Almost none of my teachers and only a few of my classmates at Reedley College were fellow Mennonites or evangelicals. But one of the important groups in which I was involved during my two years at Reedley College was the local chapter of the Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), a sister organization to the KGK in Japan. Many of the other members of our local IVCF group were fellow Mennonites, but IVCF also opened the door for me into a much larger, more ecumenical understanding of Christian faith. I learned that I had wonderful Christian brothers and sisters who were Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians whose theological understandings were, in many ways, quite different from the fundamentalism that I had learned at “home” in the Reedley



MB Church, at Immanuel, at camp, etc. but they were, nevertheless, beloved children of God and followers of Jesus. In many ways, IVCF provided a second religious “home” for me in a much bigger house and with a much larger family.

A second major experience of leaving home happened when I was drafted into the U.S. Army in July, 1955, shortly after my graduation from Reedley College and my engagement to Ruth Neufeld. Ruth was my fellow student at Immanuel and Reedley College, and my neighbor on our family farms. But she was a member of the First Mennonite Church in Reedley, a congregation that was part of the Mennonite General Conference (GC), a Mennonite denomination that was open to suspicions of harboring “modernists.” Some of the members of Ruth’s church attended movies, danced, smoked, and drank alcohol, all of which were on the fundamentalists’ list of “sins.” Many of us MBs felt like we had good reasons to feel spiritually superior to those more “worldly” GC Mennonites. I entered the military as a non-combatant “conscientious objector” (CO), which meant that I was legally permitted to refuse to use weapons. Almost all of us COs served in the medical corps. This was an arrangement made by the “peace churches” with the U.S. Government and it was similar to what the Mennonites in Russia had negotiated with their government in the years prior to the Communist Revolution. We trained together in San Antonio, Texas.

For me, life in the military was my first immersion in the “real world” of American society, so I was quite shocked at the drunkenness and obsession with sex that characterized the conversation and the behavior of too many of my fellow soldiers. I began to wonder what it means when people say “Christian America.” Fortunately, I was blessed with a number of good Christian friends with whom I could associate.

Almost all of us soldiers in the unit with which I was trained were sent to Korea, where, against all odds, I was assigned to the same company as my cousin, Earl Enns. Our military transport ship arrived in Inchon in January, 1956, several years after the end of the war in Korea in 1952 but while Korea was still a very poor country, struggling to recover from the devastation of the war. I was assigned to an infantry company where I served as medical aid man, providing what little medical aid I could to soldiers in my unit who became ill or suffered minor injuries. Anyone with a serious condition was passed on to a clinic or hospital.

I learned very little about Korea during the 16 months that I served there because almost everywhere outside of our bases was “off limits” to us military men, but all of us were eager to travel to Japan on leaves-of-absence, or “rest and recuperation” (R and R), or religious retreats, or for any reason that we could devise, because Japan was much more economically developed in the mid-1950s than Korea. Japan was clean, orderly, and beginning to be prosperous, so going to Japan seemed like going half way home.

It was during one of my trips from Korea to Japan in 1956 that I had my first contact with the MB mission in Japan. The MB missionaries had only been in Japan for about five years when I visited them in 1956 and 1957, but I was very happy to stay in their big house in Ishibashi, attend their churches, visit the newly acquired Nosegawa campsite, attend tent evangelistic meetings, and meet some of the young people who could speak English. After just a few of these visits, Ruth and I added missionary service to our list of possibilities for our career choices.

Ruth and I were married in June, 1957, shortly after the completion of my 21 months of military service. I transferred my academic credits from Reedley College to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where Ruth was completing her degree. We spent two busy years in Santa Barbara, again enjoying good relationships with IVCF and participating in an interdenominational church. Our first daughter, Terri Lynn, was born during those years in Santa Barbara.

A third experience of leaving home happened when I entered Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California in the fall of 1959. I chose to study at Fuller rather than the MB seminary in Fresno because at that time MBBS was a very new and small school and because of the advice of IVCF leaders whose opinions we valued. I will mention two things that happened to me during my three years of study at Fuller. First, I enjoyed learning about a “neo-evangelical theology” that combined academic integrity with Christian piety. I enjoyed studying under scholars like Edward John Carnell, George Eldon Ladd, and Paul King Jewett who were committed to the biblical texts, the historical theological traditions of the church, and to serious scholarship. Second, I learned much more than I had known before about my own Anabaptist-Mennonite theological heritage. IVCF, the neo-evangelicals and the Anabaptism that I learned at Fuller were all critical of fundamentalism and dispensationalism as these movements had developed in

America, so it was easy for me to become more critical of the fundamentalism with which I had grown up. I was moving away from the theological home of my childhood. I do not think there were many “liberals” at Fuller, but many denominations were represented in both the faculty and the student body. The boundaries that separated us seemed to be less important than what we shared in common.

The next big move away from our old homes was in 1962 when our family moved to Japan as MB missionaries. By this time, two more daughters, Connie and Karen, had joined our family of five.

### BECOMING MB MISSIONARIES

During the spring of 1961 MB “patriarch” J. B. Toews visited the four of us MBs who were students at Fuller Seminary. He wanted to “recruit” us for service in our MB denomination. Rev. Toews was the Executive Secretary of the MB Board of Foreign Missions at that time. He suggested that Ruth and I should consider applying for a position with the mission board since the board was planning to send a family to do “student evangelism” in Japan. Since I had enjoyed my brief visits in Japan and I had several years of student ministry experience with IVCF (and in a Hispanic Methodist church in Pasadena where I served part-time as youth minister), this seemed to us to be a good fit between our background and this ministry opportunity. After prayer and consultations, we decided to apply for this position.

There were several obstacles. First, I needed to be honest about my theological convictions and my feelings about several ethical issues that were included in the application form that was part of the process of becoming an MB missionary. I confessed that I did not agree with the dispensational theology that was advocated by many MBs. I did believe, I said, that there would be some kind of second coming of Christ, but I had no idea about the details. And I also confessed that we had occasionally attended movies for several years. We had even taken our Hispanic Methodist youth group to a showing of *West Side Story*, a musical tale of racial and ethnic conflicts with which they were very familiar. So we could not agree that attending movies, drinking alcohol, or dancing were always wrong for Christians. But, I wrote, we valued participation in the MB community more highly than engaging in these activities, so we promised to refrain as long as these

were prohibited by the MB community. We were surprised when no one raised any questions about any of this. The questions came later.

The second big issue was the matter of Ruth's baptism. She had been baptized into membership in the First Mennonite Church in Reedley upon confession of her personal faith in Jesus Christ, but, since her church was part of the General Conference Mennonite denomination, she had been baptized by sprinkling rather than by immersion as was required for membership in an MB church at that time. So Ruth would have to be re-baptized by immersion before she could be accepted for missionary service with the MBs. We were very hesitant to comply with this requirement because it seemed to call into question the validity of her first baptism, but, after consultations and prayers we agreed to comply with this requirement, even though we could not embrace the theology behind it.

After we were accepted by the MB mission board for service in Japan, I was asked to spend the summer of 1962 as a student at MBBS. I had not studied at any MB institution of higher learning, so the Board thought I should learn more about our denomination before representing the MBs as a foreign missionary. I greatly enjoyed a course in Anabaptist history taught by MBBS professor Dr. A. J. Klassen. The course made it clear to me that the seminary had transitioned away from fundamentalism and dispensationalism and was establishing Anabaptism as its new theological center. My experiences at MBBS also confirmed for me that Anabaptism was my real spiritual home.

We were ordained for missionary service during the summer of 1962. When we left for Japan later that summer, I was 27 years old, Ruth was 26, and our children were four and one half, three, and one year old. In retrospect, we were very young and we were without any significant experience in church leadership. We were also very ignorant about Japan, about missions, and about many other things, too.

#### ARRIVAL AND EARLY ADJUSTMENTS TO LIFE IN JAPAN

We traveled across the Pacific Ocean on an old freighter named *Wild Ranger* that was ill-equipped for toddlers. The railings around the open deck consisted mostly of widely spaced cables. We had to watch our three small daughters very carefully. The big excitement during our two weeks on the Pacific was the death

and burial at sea of one of the members of the ship's crew. That was a very moving experience.

MB missionary Jonathan Bartel met us when we disembarked in Yokohama. Our first experience of culture shock came when Ruth tried to use a toilet in the restroom in the Yokohama train station. She was frustrated when there was not a toilet in any of the stalls. She did not yet know about the old style floor level fixtures that were in use in public restrooms in those days. Many other experiences of culture shock awaited us. Many were pleasant, some were not.

Since the MB mission staff in Japan was doubled in size around the time of our arrival, finding housing for everyone was not easy. Our family moved into the second floor of the MB mission house up on Nagamineyama in Rokko, an eastern suburb of Kobe, just below the campus of the Canadian Academy (CA). The Koop family lived on the first floor and our two maids lived up in the attic. The Koops were from British Columbia, Canada and their missionary assignment was to serve as teachers at CA.

I had visited Japan during my army days, but only for short periods of time and mostly as a tourist, so I knew almost nothing about Japanese history, culture, or society, and Ruth did not even know about Japanese toilets, so, of course, we knew nothing at all about the language. We soon became students in the missionary language school in Rokko. Both of us were able to study in the mornings because our maid, Asako Oyama (later Nishihara), took care of our children. She also became our mentor in many things Japanese: shopping, cooking, bathing, and many customs that were new and strange to us. She also tutored us in the Japanese language. Often when we returned from our missionary language classes and tried to use our newly learned Japanese vocabulary, phrases or sentence structures, her disconcerting response was "Oh, we never say it that way anymore." But Asako Oyama was enormously helpful to us in many ways besides just helping care for our children. Her friendship and assistance enriched our lives. They were life-long gifts to us and our three young daughters. Our gratitude to her will never end.

After one year in the Rokko language school, the Koops and we transferred to a new language study program sponsored by the *Nihon Kokusai Kenkyuujo* (International Institute for Japan Studies) that was associated with Kwansei

Gakuin University in Nishinomiya. Their approach to language learning was based on more current linguistic principles and included much more attention to the cultural context, so we made field trips to places like Tachikui, the village in Hyogo Prefecture where they have been making Tamba pottery for 1200 years, and activities like a tea ceremony that lasted four hours. None of it was easy, but we were beginning to learn how to communicate and we were developing a new understanding of what Japanese culture and society were all about. We were also learning to respect and appreciate a way of life that was very different from what we had known at “home.” That learning process continued for the next 50 years.

#### LEARNING TO BE MENNONITE BRETHERN MISSIONARIES IN JAPAN

We arrived in Japan with little knowledge of the language and culture, and we also arrived with little understanding of missions in general, or of the MB approach to mission work in Japan in particular. So in many ways we experienced two forms of culture shock at the same time: Japan and mission work. First I will list some of our early frustrations and then I will identify just a few of the many positive rewards that we enjoyed during our early years in Japan. We had just completed studies in a large, ecumenical, neo-evangelical seminary in one of the largest and most diverse cities in America, and we arrived with a new appreciation for our Anabaptist-Mennonite theological heritage. None of this prepared us well for what the MB missionaries in Japan were doing.

Some of our earliest surprises were related to the legalistic taboos that some of the MB missionaries brought with them from their fundamentalist homes, churches and schools in North America. One of our first shocks came when the Koops and we were informed that we should not attend a performance by a Russian ballet troupe in Kobe because that would be too “worldly” for MB missionaries. It was important that missionaries maintain a very clear boundary between our Christian faith and “the world.” We were shocked, again, when we were told that at least some of the MB missionaries and pastors had discouraged their members from singing in a large choral performance of Handel’s *Messiah* in a large concert hall because some of the musicians would be from “liberal” churches and some might even be non-Christians. I was even more surprised when I read recently that one of the objections to MB church members singing in that performance of the *Messiah* was because the accompanying orchestral group

sometimes played jazz. We could not agree that these were appropriate ways to draw boundaries between the “church” and the “world.”

Another matter became such a serious concern that it found its way onto the agenda of the MB Board of Foreign Missions during their spring, 1964 meeting. The problem began when we visited with the youth group in one of the new MB churches in the Kansai area. The young people wanted me to explain why it was a sin to attend movies. I responded several times with what I had written in my missionary application papers: that we did not attend movies because the MB community had decided that we should not, and participating in the community was more important to us than attending movies. But, when they continued to press me about my own personal opinion, I finally did. I explained that I thought movies were much like other forms of information and entertainment such as books, newspapers, magazines and TV, and that it was important for the church to help us to be discriminating in what we expose ourselves to. This led to a meeting with the MB missionary leadership. We had no right to express personal opinions like this, we were told, because this was undercutting what the missionaries were teaching their members. It was painful for us to hear that they did not want us to visit their churches if we were going to subvert their work by saying things like this.

The minutes of the meeting of the board indicate that they had not read our application papers carefully enough before they sent us to Japan, so they were unaware of how our theology and our ethical standards differed from those of the other missionaries in Japan. The board apologized for sending us without screening us carefully enough. The board instructed us to read the official MB statements concerning movie attendance and the relevant biblical passages about separation from the world. They hoped that we would be able to adjust our attitudes. As was the case with this and many other ethical matters, practices in North America gradually changed and movie attendance was no longer an issue. But it was painful for us to realize that we were so out of step with our missionary colleagues in Japan, and that the mission board was positioning itself as the guardian of a very conservative understanding of the nature of the Christian faith and life.

The nature of our missionary assignment also became a serious enough issue that it, too, made it onto the agenda of the mission board. We were sent to Japan to do "student evangelism," but, after a year or so, we were informed that special student work was mostly the idea of mission administrators in North America and it was not supported by all of the missionaries and Japanese pastors on the field. One objection was that specific groups should not be singled out for special ministries. If there is a specialized worker for university students, should there also be special workers for salarymen, or shopkeepers, or housewives? Since there is only one gospel for all mankind, it is not appropriate to have special ministries for specific groups of people. We were asked to pastor one of the MB church plants rather than do "student evangelism." We replied that we had no preparation, no experience, and no sense of call to pastoral ministries, so we thought it would not be appropriate to change our assignment so soon after our arrival in Japan. Another concern was that student evangelism might be isolated from the ministries of the local congregations, but that was not our intention at all. Our goal was to serve as a kind of "bridge" between students who had no connections with the Christian church and the local congregations. The mission board apologized for sending us to Japan with a special assignment that had not been sufficiently processed with the people on the field. As it finally turned out, I spent most of my time during our first three and one half years in Japan teaching English and English Bible classes on the Ishibashi campus of the national Osaka University and in the Ishibashi, Nagase (next door to Kinki University) and Mukogawa MB churches. We also hosted, together with the other MB missionaries, English Bible camps on the Nosegawa camp site. For a while I taught English in the Osaka Biblical Seminary (OBS) in the former missionary residence in Ishibashi.

One of the camps in which we were involved revealed another fissure in our relationships with most of our fellow MB missionaries in Japan. The various Mennonite related mission groups in Japan cooperated in an occasional "Student Peace Seminar." In 1965 it was the MB's turn to host this program on the Nosegawa campsite. MB evangelist Rev. Fumio Kurita and I worked together to plan and organize the camp. But just a few days before the camp was to begin, Rev. Kurita and I were asked by the MB missionary leadership to cancel the camp because the MBs did not agree with the "peace theology" of the other Mennonite



groups. A “peace seminar” would be too close to what “liberal” and secular peace groups were doing in Japan, so we MBs should remain separate from that. Rev. Kurita and I responded that it was too late to cancel since some of the participants who were traveling from distant parts of Japan had already purchased their train tickets.

This episode was part of the larger pattern of MB separation from what other Christian groups, including other Mennonites, were doing in Japan. The withdrawal of the MBs from the cooperative OBS was another example of MB separatism. I was surprised to learn recently that the MB missionaries had initially resisted cooperation with the Billy Graham and Bob Pierce (World Vision) evangelistic crusades in Japan because both organizations insisted on a broad base of sponsorship, so the cooperating organizations included some denominations whose membership included “liberals.” We were eager to encourage more inter-Mennonite fellowship and cooperation and we enjoyed a wide range of ecumenical friendships, as we had during our years with IVCF and at Fuller Seminary.

In a September 27, 1955 letter from Harry Friesen to J. B. Toews, Rev. Friesen reported to Rev. Toews that “We have found the spirit of liberalism to be the greatest hindrance to Christianity in this land.” Many MBs in North America shared with Harry Friesen this same eagerness to remain “separate” from all “liberals” and “modernists,” and the 1902 MB COF did express the spirit of “over-against-ness” that Howard Loewen noted, but many MB leaders were more open and ecumenical than that. As I reported, MB denominational leader P. C. Hiebert served as chairman of the board of directors for MCC for several decades and the Thielmans in the MCC Center in Osaka cooperated across a broad range of denominational and interdenominational organizations, including groups supported by the World Council of Churches. I noticed comments by several of the MB mission administrators that eventually the JMBC would need to learn to cooperate with others even though there were disagreements about some issues. We thought it was important that MBs in Japan understand that part of the MB world, too. It seemed to some of the other MB missionaries that we were trying to subvert their work. Now, many years later, I am sure that we were not as wise and as loving as we should have been.

I will briefly describe several other matters about which we experienced tensions and disagreements with our fellow MB missionaries.

Vacations. We did not appreciate the fundamentalism and pietism that characterized the missionary gatherings in the Karuizawa Conference Center in Nagano Prefecture. We preferred the more relaxed atmosphere of the nearby missionary vacation area on the shores of Lake Nojiri where some of our friends spent the hottest season.

Beards. My beard became an issue in 1970 when a group of MB young people from North America visited Japan on a mission trip. None of the young men were permitted to come with beards or long hair. In April, 1972, Vernon Stobbe, a Canadian MB man and his Japanese wife who were teaching English and Bible classes in Tokyo, inquired about the possibility of becoming MB missionaries. They were invited to visit with the MB missionaries and JMBC pastors in Osaka but cancelled when the missionaries requested that he shave his beard before the visit because his beard would be “an offense to the Japanese brethren.”

Kobe Union Church. During most of our many visits to Japan, Ruth and our daughters enjoyed participating fairly regularly in the worship and other activities of the international and ecumenical Kobe Union Church in Kobe. I also attended from time to time. The Koop family actively participated in the life of this congregation for many years, but some other MB missionaries expressed suspicion and concern about the influence of “liberal” people in the congregation.

Miscellaneous Tensions. I will simply list a series of other questions and issues that were causes of overt or covert tensions: Is it OK for women missionaries to wear makeup? Is it OK for missionary families to play card games, like *Rook*? Is burial in the ground necessary for Christians or is cremation OK? Is it OK for missionary children to attend a school activity that includes dancing? When is it permissible for Bible School or seminary students to read books written by liberal or neo-orthodox authors? When Harry Friesen was granted permission to study for a doctoral degree, I encouraged him to use his already good understanding of the Japanese language and culture to study in a Japanese Studies program in a place like Harvard University or the University of California, Berkeley and the nearby Graduate Theological Union. This would help him to deepen these understandings so that he could make a more significant contribution to the

“contextualization” of the Christian gospel in Japan, but he preferred to study in the dispensational Dallas Theological Seminary, where he wrote a dissertation that argued against “universalism.”

#### SOME OF THE JOYS OF MISSIONARY LIFE IN JAPAN

If we were so out of step with our fellow MB missionaries in Japan, why did we stay for three and one half years? The first reason was that MB missionary terms were normally six years, so we did not want to quit early. But when the mission board shortened terms from six years to three, we decided that we should take this opportunity to return “home” to America to reconsider our “call” and to explore other options. We spent three and one half years in Japan during this first term. Second, we were pleased to be part of a mission program that was experiencing a good deal of success. Even in those days it was difficult for Japanese people to come to Christian faith and for congregations to grow, but the MB missionaries were accomplishing those goals more effectively than many other Christian groups. Rev. Fujino’s graph of the numerical growth of MB church membership shows steady increases to about the year 1990 when growth slowed and then declined slightly. We wanted to contribute what we could to the successes of the mission. We also had great respect for Rev. Arita and for many of the other people whom we learned to know in the MB churches in Japan. We enjoyed friendships with many of the church members (and others) that lasted for many years.

There were many things about everyday life in Japan that we soon learned to truly enjoy. We appreciated the beauty of nature: mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, seashores, and the changing seasons. We learned to savor exotic Japanese cuisine that our family and friends at home could not even imagine. We found the ancient temples, shrines and gardens beautiful and fascinating. Reading some of the literature and appreciating some of the arts opened windows on the ancient and complicated culture of Japan. Because of a variety of unusual circumstances, for about one and one-half years we were privileged to live in a magnificent and historic old house in Okamoto, a suburb of Kobe, that had been designed and built by the Japanese writer, Jun’ichiro Tanizaki.

Learning the Japanese language as an adult is an enormous challenge that requires a huge investment of time, energy, and money, but it was gratifying to

realize that we were making progress. Being present in Japan over a period of years and gaining at least a modest level of fluency in the language opened the door for a deeper than just a superficial understanding of the culture, though I am sure that there were many things we did not get right. We had to come to terms with the fact that we were *gaijin* (literally “outside people”) and would always remain so, but we could at least begin to understand and appreciate this way of life that was very different from our own native culture. As *gaijin* we could never fully enter the real “house” of Japanese culture as members of the family, but perhaps we could stand in the *genkan* (entry-way) and we were sometimes invited up into some of the rooms to join the “family” as guests. For that we remain grateful.

We learned a new cultural vocabulary that helped us to understand the people and the way of life around us: the notion of *on* (feeling of obligation to reciprocate) that anthropologist Ruth Benedict thought was at the heart of all of Japanese culture; the meanings of terms like *gimu* (duty), *giri* (responsibility), *sonkei* (respect), and *ninjou* (human feelings); the importance of understanding the meaning of a *tate-shakai* society in which social relationships are structured vertically; the distinction between *honne* (inner feelings) and *tatemae* (public face). Psychiatrist Doi Takeo’s interpretation of *amae* as one of the fundamental values that sets Japanese “dependency” and the “independence” that is so highly valued in almost all western cultures apart from one another. We learned to appreciate and respect a culture and society that values continuity, connectivity, and community more than just individualism, materialism and constant change.

Of course we also learned about some of the many problems that need to be dealt with by the Japanese people. I will provide just a short list: natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, volcanoes and fires; limited supplies of some of the natural resources that are necessary for life in an industrial, urban society: oil, gas, and space to grow the food needed by a large and densely concentrated population. There is a vocabulary for social problems, too: the *burakumin* (*eta*) “outcast” community; *chikan* (perverts) and the abuse and suppression of women; *karoushi* (work to death) and the exploitation of workers by their companies; *hikikomori* (extreme social withdrawal) and other problems for young people trying to find their “place” in the family and society; and, more recently, *muenshakai*, the deterioration of close social relationships; and increasing

numbers of homeless people. We learned that there are many things to admire about Japanese culture and society, but we learned, too, that, as is the case in every society, there are serious problems to be overcome.

We developed some very rewarding, long-term friendships in Japan, many with Japanese people, but also with fellow foreigners, MB and other. Our children were receiving a fine education in the Canadian Academy and they were enjoying their friends from around the world. They were growing up in a much richer social and cultural environment than we knew when we were children.

There were developments in the MB world in North America that we also found encouraging. Two denominational leaders, Canadian MB editor and novelist Rudy Wiebe and philosopher Delbert Wiens in the U.S., were writing honest and thoughtful analyses of the state of the denomination. The merger of the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of Welfare represented a new attempt to reduce the separation of doing practical good and verbal proclamation of the gospel. Visits to Japan by three North American MB denominational leaders greatly lifted our spirits: Dr. Frank C Peters, Pastor Marvin Hein, and Rev. Waldo Hiebert. It was easy for us to identify with the more Anabaptist and neo-evangelical approach to Christian faith and life that these men (and others) represented.

But our letters from those early years in Japan also indicate that we were restless, frustrated, and sometimes depressed. On the one hand, we were enjoying many aspects of our lives in Japan, but, on the other hand, we were not comfortable with our role as “missionaries.” There were many fundamental questions being raised in those days about the whole idea of “mission” as it was being practiced. We were wondering what we should do, so when the mission board shortened the length of terms of service, we decided to return to the U.S. But before we left Japan, we had many conversations about other ways that we might be of service in Japan in roles other than that of the traditional “missionary.” One possibility was to return to Japan as self-supporting “tent-maker” missionaries, like some of our other Mennonite missionary friends were negotiating with their missions. The MB missionaries in Japan indicated that they would have no objections if the MB mission board wanted to support us in this. So it was with these thoughts in mind that we returned to California during the summer of 1966, after three and one half years in Japan as MB missionaries.

## TRYING AGAIN: “TENT-MAKER” MISSIONARIES IN JAPAN

Since teaching in a Japanese university seemed like the most promising way for us to continue with the “student ministries” to which we had felt called in the first place, we spent two years in California while I completed a Master’s degree in sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. I also spent part of a summer term as a student at MBBS before we returned to Japan. We were active in an American Baptist congregation during our second period of time in Santa Barbara, where there were no Mennonite gatherings at that time. We returned to Japan in March, 1968.

Negotiating a new and different approach to missionary service in Japan was like solving a complicated puzzle: all of the pieces needed to fit together. For example, finances. We did not have enough money to pay for transportation across the Pacific, nor for the *shikikin* (key money) that was needed to rent a house in Japan. We asked MBM/S to help us with those expenses. We needed agreement with our children, then 9, 7, and 6 years old, that they were willing to return to Japan. Because of difficult experiences that they had had previously as *gaijin* (foreigner) students in Japanese schools, they were willing to return to Japan *if* they could attend an international school rather than Japanese schools. That meant that we needed two incomes: one for tuition for three students in a private school and one for our other living expenses. Osaka University professor Tomoyuki Harada, whom I had learned to know and respect during our earlier years in Japan, arranged for me to teach part-time at Osaka University in Ishibashi and, more importantly, he negotiated with a former colleague of his who was then the President of Osaka Shoin Women’s College, for Ruth and me to both teach at Osaka Shoin, Ruth in the high school and I in the college.

Negotiations with the MB mission proved to be more difficult. We were surprised to learn that the MB missionaries on the field no longer supported our proposal. They wanted student ministers, but only full-time missionaries who had been trained by Campus Crusade for Christ. Furthermore, the MB missionaries in Japan wanted no additional “single sister” missionaries. Theirs was a very narrow and traditional vision for missionary service in Japan. Nevertheless, MBM/S did finally agree to support us in our proposed “experiment,” so our family flew to Japan in March, 1968.

It did not take long before we were caught up in a very hectic schedule. We rented a charming but small (620 square feet on two floors) house in Okamoto, near our children's school, but far from Osaka Shoin Women's College in Higashi (East) Osaka and Ishibashi. We each taught at Shoin three days each week. I taught in Ishibashi one half day each week, and I sometimes had other classes, too, at IBM, in the Mainich Newspaper Office in downtown Osaka, and in a small private school near Mukogawa, between Kobe and Osaka. I sometimes did Japanese language studies in the International Institute for Japanese Studies in Nigawa also between Kobe and Osaka, and, in exchange, I helped with some translation projects there. I also worked together with Professor Jun'ichi Takemoto at Shoin translating short stories by well-known writers Osamu Dazai and Shusaku Endo, author of the novel *Silence* and many other works that deal with Christianity in Japan.

But our purpose in being in Japan was not just to teach English. We also wanted to be of service to the church. So I taught English Bible classes in the Ishibashi, Nagase, and Mukogawa MB churches. I worked with the KGK (Japanese IVCF) groups at Shoin and Osaka University. We did not feel that our work could be effective without the active hospitality and support of the local churches. We found that their responses varied. I mostly attended the Ishibashi and Mukogawa MB churches, but Ruth and our daughters eventually made the international and ecumenical Kobe Union Church their church home. Needless to say, we spent a lot of time on commuter trains.

By the end of 1969, we were reconsidering our situation. We had been in Japan for a total of six years. I was 35 years old. We had no savings, no retirement account, only Japanese health insurance. Our oldest daughter was ready to enter junior high school. Our house was too small for our growing girls, who were, after all, still Americans who wanted more space than their Japanese counterparts seemed to need. A larger house would require more income. Our feelings were mixed. Again, there were many things about our lives in Japan that we enjoyed very much and our daughters were willing to stay on, but our professional situations were not particularly rewarding. For me, teaching English conversation in Japan was a professional dead end. I was a sociologist, not a linguist. We were not sure that we were contributing enough in our church service that it was worthwhile to continue on. We were especially concerned about our "third

culture” children who had already spent a good part of their growing-up years as *gaijin* (foreigners) away from their extended families, culture, and church in their “home” country.

Just at the time we were weighing these and many other issues, I received word about an opening in sociology-anthropology at what was then Pacific College, the MB school in Fresno, California. I applied for and was appointed to that position. We made arrangements for someone to replace us in our jobs and we returned to California during the summer of 1970, but that was not the end of our connections with Japan.

We returned to Japan many times during the next 35 years because there were many things that we continued to enjoy about life in Japan: reconnecting with old friends and making new ones; always learning many new things; and trying to be helpful in the life of the church. We had invested a lot of time and energy in learning some of the Japanese language and a little about Japanese history and culture and we did not want that investment to go to waste. I will simply list and very briefly identify the main purposes that we had in each of these return visits.

1975-1976: Sabbatical leave-of-absence for Ph.D. (sociology) dissertation research (one year);

1986: Church member profile of the various Mennonite groups in Japan (six months);

1991: Substitute teacher at Kwansei Gakuin University and writing projects (six months);

1994, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001: FPU/Osaka Shoin Women’s College exchange program: leader for 30 day study programs in Japan for groups of FPU students;

2002-2003: Volunteer teachers, living in Iwade-cho, Wakayama Prefecture, teaching in the Kawachi-Nagano and Sakai-Chuo MB churches (one year);

2003-2005: Volunteer interim pastors, Komaki Hope Chapel, near Nagoya (19 months).

2006: Brief visit for dedication of new Komaki Hope Chapel facilities (10 days).



MB missionary-anthropologist Dr. Jacob Loewen came to think of his missionary role as that of a “catalyst,” bringing together diverse cultural and religious elements to produce something new. For many years we used a different metaphor for what we attempted to accomplish. We thought of our role as a “bridge” that connects two different points and carries traffic in two directions. While in Japan, we attempted to connect students and others who were outside of the Christian faith and church with what faith and church had to offer. We hoped to connect people who were inside the church with other understandings of the Christian life. We tried to learn for ourselves what it meant to live as a part of Japanese culture and society, and during our years in Japan we hosted many family and friends from North America as our guests for shorter and longer periods of time. During our early missionary years, we hosted at least 30 visiting pastors, mission administrators, and missionaries from other countries. It somehow became my duty (and privilege) to introduce official MB visitors to some of the important historical sites in the Kansai area. During the later years of my teaching career at FPU, we directed five thirty-day study programs for a total of about 60 FPU students. Six FPU faculty members joined us for at least parts of these study programs. During our two and one-half years in Iwade-cho and Komaki (2002-2005), twenty family and friends from North America spent time with us. In each case we were eager to share what we had learned about life in Japan and we were always happy to introduce our *gaijin* (foreigner) guests to our friends in Japanese MB churches.

Since we wanted to be a “bridge” of hospitality that carried traffic in both directions, we welcomed many of our Japanese friends to Fresno. Over a period of nearly 20 years, FPU hosted approximately 250 students and ten faculty and administrators from Osaka Shoin Women’s College on our campus, in our surrounding community, and in our local MB homes and churches. More than 25 of our Japanese friends from Iwade-cho and Komaki visited us here in Fresno after our return in 2005. For many years we maintained another form of connection with Japan: We assisted at least 15 students from Japan who were studying at FPU or in the seminary. Just as we had attempted to introduce our foreign visitors in Japan to life in Japanese society, we tried to introduce our Japanese guests in Fresno to life in American culture and society. Someone else will have to evaluate

the effectiveness of our efforts, but for us, we greatly enjoyed these many visits and visitors on both sides of the Pacific.

## BACK AT HOME IN FRESNO

After 1970 Japan remained an important component, but it was no longer the central focus of our lives in the way it had once been. We had returned “home.” Again, I will simply list some of what that meant for us:

1. Family Relationships: We were happy to be present for many family relationships, events, and activities: weddings, births, anniversaries, the illnesses and deaths of our parents and many other friends and relatives.

2. Professions: Ruth has enjoyed a variety of professional experiences: teacher, house remodeler, social service administrator. I taught at FPU for 30 years, also serving as chair of the social science division and, for four years, Dean of the College (1981-1985). We both retired in 2000.

3. Church: The College Community Church MB (recently renamed Willow Avenue Mennonite Church) has been our church home since 1970. For many years we served on committees, commissions and the church council. We sang in the choir, taught classes, and contributed in other ways. I served as Moderator (lay leader) twice and as part time interim pastor for six months during 2007.

4. Travel Experiences: Since I am reviewing experiences that have helped to shape the perspective that I bring to this project, I must include the many travel adventures that we have been privileged to enjoy. We traveled almost the full length of Japan, from Sapporo and Obihiro on the island of Hokkaido in the north to Miyazaki and Nagasaki on Kyushu in the south. We also visited Okinawa. Also in Asia, we visited Korea, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, and Viet Nam. We have spent time in Haiti, Mexico and Costa Rica. We traveled in England and Scotland. A highlight of our lives was the “Mennonite Heritage Cruise” that included visits to the former homes of our ancestors, including Ruth’s father, in the Mennonite villages in what is now Ukraine. Another river cruise took us up the Rhine and Mosel from Antwerp, Belgium to Basel, Switzerland. Closer to home, we have visited several parts of Canada and we spent several longer periods of time away from Fresno. During 2010-2011 we lived in Hesston, Kansas for ten months while I taught at Hesston College (MC, now MCUSA) and during

most of 2014 we lived in Phoenix, Arizona while Ruth served as interim director of Goldensun, a Mennonite (MCUSA) program that provides residences and other support for developmentally disabled adults.

## ON BEING AT HOME

We felt a sense of “home” during most of our years in Fresno because our lives were characterized by a level of coherence that is unusual in the industrialized, urbanized, bureaucratized, post-modern world in which most of us now live. For most of us, our lives are segmented and compartmentalized, with clear boundaries between the various institutions in which we live our everyday lives: family, neighborhood, school, work, recreation, etc., and, for some, church. We learn how to relate to the different groups of people whom we meet in each of these various institutional settings, and we learn to follow the rules for behavior that are appropriate in each of these settings, but we do not expect to meet the same people in these various locations. Neither do we expect that there will be any consistency or coherence that holds everything together around any one particular center.

For most of our years in Fresno, our lives were different from all of that. Several of the institutions in which we participated overlapped and shared common commitments. We met the same people in our places of work (FPU and MBBS), in our Kerckhoff neighborhood, and at the College Community Church. Some of these people were also our relatives. Many of us made intentional efforts to shape our lives according to what we understood to be the “Anabaptist vision,” which can be succinctly summarized as in the Confession of Faith at CCCMB: “Jesus is the center of our faith; community is the center of our lives; and peace and reconciliation are the center of our work.” That is what we understood to be our calling as Anabaptist-Mennonite Christians. And for many years, in the college, the seminary, the congregation, and in our neighborhood we tried to fulfill that calling. It was our way of acting in accordance with the prayer of Jesus that “God’s will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It is experiences and convictions such as these that have been in my mind as I have compiled the information and presented the ideas that are in this report.

We have never regretted the big decisions that we made in the course of our lives: to marry and have children; to go to Japan as MB missionaries in 1962, as

self-supporting, associates of the MB mission in 1968, or to return to the U.S. in 1970 to teach at what became FPU. Each of these decisions enriched our lives and provided us with platforms for being of service to the church and society around us.

This research and writing project is undoubtedly the final link in the long chain of experiences and relationships that have connected us with Japan over a period of more than 55 years. I felt deeply honored by the invitation to attempt this project and I have learned many things in the process. There were many surprises along the way, some pleasant, some disappointing and hurtful. Ruth and I felt even more honored and surprised when we were invited to visit Japan one more time in June, 2017 to present to the JMBC pastors an interim report on what I have learned in this research. Unfortunately, we had to conclude that our health conditions (my hearing loss and Ruth's problems with mobility) at that time meant that another visit to Japan would be mostly frustrating for us, a burden for our hosts, and our ability to contribute would be minimal. So we have almost certainly made our last trip to Japan.

I am presenting my report on this research project in writing, not in person. But our hearts and minds will always remain filled with many fond memories from our many years of experiences and relationships in Japan. We are grateful. I am submitting this report as one small token of our appreciation for the hospitality and friendship that we experienced in Japan, with the hope that at least a few persons will find at least some parts of this report useful in the larger work of building the Kingdom of God.

## 2. M.B. Mission and JMBC Photos



MCC Osaka Service Center (c. 1951)



Thielman family with students (c. 1951)



Tent Evangelism (c. 1958)



Preparation for Tent Evangelism



Missionary Roland Wiens, Rev. K Kitano



First MB Bible Institute (c. 1956)





Missionary Harry Friesen



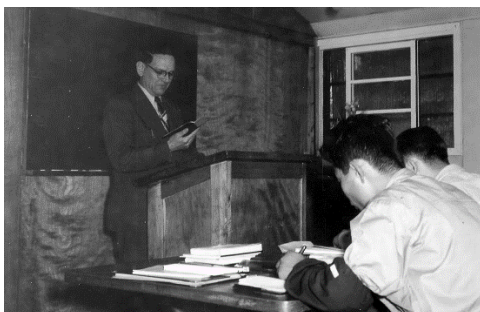
Ruth Wiens with Sunday School Students



Evangelistic Meeting, Osaka Nakanoshima Hall



Dedication of MB Bible Institute, Ishibashi (1959)

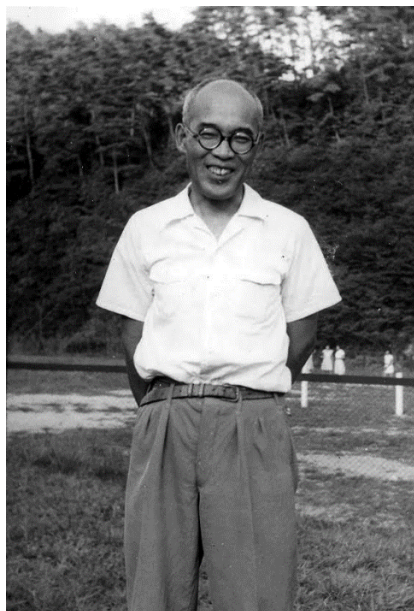


Jonathan Bartell, MB Bible Institute



English Bible Camp, Nosegawa Campsite (c. 1966)





Rev. K. Kitano



Rev. Masaru Arita and Family (c. 1960)



Mission Residence, Rokko, Kobe



M.B. Mission Summer "Rest House," Karuizawa



Osaka Biblical Seminary Faculty (c. 1966)



Osaka Biblical Seminary Faculty and Students (c. 1966)



Osaka Biblical Seminary Faculty and Students



Early Sunday Worship Service, Ishibashi



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*Direction*. The journal, *Direction*, has been jointly sponsored by six Mennonite Brethren colleges, universities and seminaries and the Canadian and United States national conferences of Mennonite Brethren churches since 1972. All (except the most recent) issues are available online at [www.directionjournal.org](http://www.directionjournal.org). Articles are indexed by author, title, and subject.

*Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO). All of the articles in the five-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* plus recent updates provided by the Mennonite World Conference are available online at [www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org). The first four volumes of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* were originally published by the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pennsylvania in 1959 with Harold S. Bender and others as editors. Articles related to most of the persons, places and events referred to in Part One of this report are available in GAMEO.

*Mennonite Quarterly Review*. The MQR, published continuously since 1927, is one of the oldest and most sophisticated academic journals dealing with topics related to “Anabaptist-Mennonite history, thought, life and affairs.” The MQR addresses topics related to the Radical Reformation, Amish, Mennonites and Hutterites. Articles are not available online.

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